

Presented to
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by
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THE
FAITHFUL SON;

OR,

THREE CHRISTMAS EVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
AUNT LEIGH'S MISSION, ETC.



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The Faithful Son ; or Three Christmas Eves.

CHAPTER I.

ROBIN'S HOME.

IN a sunny clearing in the midst of a thick wood there stood, some years ago, a tiny cottage. So small was it, that it seemed to have but one room ; but when you looked closer you could see a little window almost hidden under the wide thatched eaves, which showed that there must be a garret in the roof.

It was a green and silent spot in which this cottage was built ; behind it was a small patch of garden, with rows of cabbages and a herb-bed ; but, save this one plot of dark soil, you saw on every side

close grass, or the soft green moss that clothed the brown roots of the trees.

On the mossy turf moved slowly the shadows of the mighty branches overhead, and little specks of flickering sunlight danced among them, as the leaves fluttered in the summer wind. Merry squirrels sprang lightly from bough to bough, while from many a hidden nook sounded the soft coo of the wood-pigeon, making even deeper, when the low plaintive note had ceased, the peaceful hush around.

It was five o'clock on a morning in early autumn; the sun had not long risen, and the grass under the trees was white with thick-sown dew-drops. Nothing living was to be seen near the cottage, save a lurcher dog who waited patiently, with hanging head, before the fast-closed door, and a group of busy hens, actively scratching up the grass under one of the nearer trees.

Presently, as if at some call or signal, they all hastened, with outspread wings and open beaks, towards the cottage; and

the dog, pricking up his ears and wagging his tail, looked up at the little window, from which a boy's head was thrust out—a head which seemed to be a crop of shaggy uncombed hair, almost covering the bright dark eyes which were looking down on the group below the window.

“Hush, Grip, hush thee!” he said, earnestly, holding up his finger, as the dog gave a sharp quick bark. “Father's asleep, as you might know if you'd give it a thought; you and he were late enough coming in last night. You'd best not wake him, I can tell you; but I'll be down and give you your breakfast, if you keep quiet.”

In another minute the boy, who might be perhaps twelve years old, but tall and heavily made for his years, softly unbarred the door, and sitting down on the step, took the dog between his knees, and began to feed him with the remains of his own supper, while from time to time he threw a little barley for the fowls, that chased

and ate it, and then returned, gathering close about him.

“So you had good sport last night, Grip,” whispered the boy into the ear of the dog, who looked up intelligently in his face. “I saw the string of birds father brought home, and the hares too. We shall have a first-rate supper to-night, I tell you, Grip, and a fine feast of bones for you; but you know all about it, don’t you, old fellow?”

A heavy step stumbling down the little wooden staircase which led into the kitchen made the boy start to his feet with a frightened look; and running into the cottage, he had seized the kettle and was half way to the spring to fill it, before his father, half asleep, and thrusting his arms, as he walked, into his dirty gray shirt, had crossed to the open door.

“Why ain’t the fire lit, you lazy good-for-nought?” grumbled he, as Robin came back with the kettle.

The boy made no answer, but gathering a bundle of dry sticks and fir-cones from

under the nearer trees, had soon set the kettle in the midst of a bright blaze. He then placed on the table some bread, some dripping in a broken saucer, and, at his father's order, a piece of a large pasty, which the man at once appropriated as his own share, while Robin stood looking on with hungry eyes until the dish was empty, and his father found leisure to speak again.

"You are a good son, you are; your father may be out half the night after food for you;" (here Robin, with almost a smile, looked at the empty dish); "he may come home tired out, and having caught the fever or the rheumatics, most like, wading in the water and what not; but you, you are snug a-bed, and never so much as give it a thought to have a comfortable basin of tea ready for him against he has to be off to work."

"I didn't think as you would be off to work this morning, father," answered Robin. "Mostly you lies a-bed till old Sally comes round, when you've been out after the

hares ; and you said last time you'd be the death of me if I so much as made the least noise till you waked up of your own self."

" 'I said,' indeed," growled the father. "You are a precious youngster, telling your father what he said. You'd like me to be late a-field, just when Squire is after turning off half his men ; 'twould please you finely to see your father turned off."

"I didn't know about Squire," answered the boy.

"Then another time, when you know nothing, don't you say nothing ; and now I'm off. You bring me a clean smock, and tie up some bread and cheese for my twelve o'clock," said the man, opening a small side door, through which he presently re-appeared, carrying in his hand a small hare.

"Folks will see it, father," said the boy, timidly, as his father stepped out of the cottage door, carrying the hare in one hand, and his dinner, tied with knots into a blue checked handkerchief, in the other.

"Folks is welcome to see it," said the

man, turning round: "they'll need all their eyes before they see anything wrong about it. I'm a-going right to the Squire with this hare. Says I, 'Squire, this here beast ain't none of mine; 'twere shot, I reckon, a matter of three days ago, when that captain chap were at the hall; and last night, when I was a-coming home from work, I found it; and here is your property, Squire.' Ha, ha," laughed the man, with a cunning look, "I don't fancy I shall be the one turned off after that."

"But, father, Squire will see plain enough that it were cotched in a trap. Why, it have got its leg broke."

"You be quiet with your talk about traps; do you want to get me into trouble? You had better keep a still tongue in your head, I can tell you: and mind you, when old Sally comes, don't you let her into the pantry. Pack her basket yourself, and cover the birds and the hares well up with her butter and eggs and what not. There is one hare put by safe for my supper; the

rest are for old Sally to sell in the town. Do you hear?"

"Yes, father," said Robin, half sullenly.

"Then mind what you're about till I come home; no playing and talking with those good-for-nothing boys. You stay here, and mind the fowls, and clean the cottage, and look out for old Sally; that's what you've got to do;" and the man went his way under the shadow of the pine trees, while little Robin turned back slowly into the empty cottage.

The boy was used to being alone, and sat down quite contentedly on the step, to eat the slice of bread and dripping which was his breakfast. He had never known any companions except Grip and the fowls, and the only faces familiar to him were those of his father and old Sally, the woman who came every day to put the two rooms in order, and cook supper for his father, and who carried to market the hares and pheasants which he trapped at nights, hidden under her own store of butter and eggs.

Robin's father was no favorite amongst the rest of the Squire's laborers. He was selfish and surly, and had won no one's good word during all the eleven years he had lived among them, ever since he had come a stranger into the quiet village, bringing in his arms his baby of about a year old, who was at first given into old Sally's charge, until he grew big enough to live with his father in the lonely cottage in the heart of the pine wood. The child had been taught to think of all the other boys of the village as his enemies, to avoid them, to run away if he met them bird's-nesting, and to refuse every offer of kindness or companionship; and they were not slow to resent this by hunting him through the woods, and by threatening him with what they would do if once they caught him, until the child, in terror, would rush home, and, barring the door, sit trembling until he heard either old Sally or his father coming through the wood. But the time for this was past now. Robin had grown

a strong, sturdy lad, quite able, and willing, too, to defend himself, and rather pleased at any opportunity of showing his old enemies, the village lads, that he was now more than their match. Perhaps after a few trials of strength they might have grown friendly, but Robin was as shy as ever; not from fear now, but from a new feeling of shame; he had begun to learn how very ignorant he was. The other boys went to school, could do sums on the slate, showed their copy-books full of strange-shaped letters, and talked to each other of the prizes and of the examination, when the Squire and Madam from the Hall always came down to the school, to hear the boys read and answer questions. Robin knew nothing of all this; he could not read, nor write, nor make one figure on a slate, and he fancied that the other boys were always thinking of this difference between them, and despising him for his ignorance. Even little Lettice Martin, who was only about half his age, a mite of a child, whom he could carry

with one hand, he thought, trotted along to school every morning with a slate almost as big as herself, and often laughed at Robin for a great dunce, when she saw him idly leaning over the stile in the morning as she passed by.

Robin was not old enough, and did not know enough to want to learn for its own sake. He scarcely even knew what learning meant, only it was something the want of which divided him from every one else ; so that it mattered little that he could run faster and climb better than any other boy of his own age for a mile round ; that he knew where all the birds' nests were hidden, and the otter's hole under the old ash ; that he could dive off the big stone, and swim to the little island in the middle of the pool ; all this, Robin thought, was nothing, so long as this wonderful, mysterious learning was a thing quite unknown to him.

But already Robin was secretly trying to learn a little. About six months ago, a peddler, coming to the village with his pack

of new prints and bright ribbons for the opening spring, had stopped to rest awhile at the cottage. Robin, alone as usual, was glad to talk a little with this stranger, and to look with wondering eyes at the mysterious bundles which had been unstrapped from the peddler's shoulder, and placed in the corner of the kitchen.

"You ought to be at school, my lad," said the man, when, refreshed with a draught of buttermilk which Robin had brought him, he prepared to set out again on his journey; "you are too big a lad to waste your time idling about in the wood."

"Father won't hear nought about my going," said Robin.

"Nay, but that's a pity; father should have more sense," said the peddler. "Folks don't make their way in the world nowadays without book-learning. Look you here at me. I'm a sharp chap, though I say it, but I'm no scholar, and so I'm tied down to be nothing but a packman all my days. If I could write and cast accounts I should have

had a shop of my own long before now. Ay, it's a pity about father."

"Don't you think I could learn myself?" asked Robin, timidly.

"It's according to what you have here," answered his new friend, touching his forehead, "and whether you know anything to feel your way with, as it were. Your letters, now—you'll have been taught your letters, surely?"

"Not one," said the boy, hanging his head. "I don't rightly know what letters are."

"Dear, dear! Well, 'tis not too late to make a beginning, boy. I have something in my pack that will maybe give you a start, and you shall have it for nothing. 'Tis not worth much, and that's the fact, but I can't spare you one of my gay books, for sixpence is sixpence to such as me." So saying, the peddler took from a corner of one of his packages a few leaves of some primer or catechism roughly stitched together, and put them into the boy's hand.

“There’s the commandments and what not printed out plain there,” said the man. “You get some one to spell it over to you, and you’ll be learning something good at the same time as you learn your letters.”

Then the man went, and left little Robin turning over the pages, on which no mark or sign had for him any meaning, and wondering much what this new word “commandments” could mean.

He and Grip had held a long consultation, with their heads together over the little book, Robin earnestly considering whether he should venture to ask little Lettice to teach him his letters, when old Sally came in as usual.

She was so deaf that no one ever attempted to do more than shout short sentences in her ear, so Robin only held up the leaf over which he had been poring, without saying a word; but when the old woman saw it her eyes brightened. Sitting down, and running her fingers along the lines, she began to read aloud the words

of the first commandment, in a shrill voice, which rose and fell unchecked by the dull ear.

"I knew them by heart when I was a girl," she said in explanation; and Robin at once gave up the idea of asking help from Lettice, and coaxed old Sally to read the commandments over to him every day, pointing to each word as she read it, until he too was able to read them nearly as correctly as the old woman herself. This very autumn morning he had planned to go over them to himself yet once more, before astonishing little Lettice with his wonderful knowledge, a feat on which he had long set his heart; and now, taking his book, he settled himself in a favorite seat in one of the branches of a large tree near the cottage, and began his work once more, steadily and carefully.

He knew all the words perfectly until he reached the eighth commandment, but there the short word at the end puzzled him, and he stopped in doubt, repeating over and over

to himself, "thou shalt not," and vainly hoping that the lost word would come back to his memory. At last he recollected it,— "Thou shalt not *steal*,"—and for the first time it came into his mind to wonder what the words themselves meant.

Hitherto it had never occurred to him that there was anything in them to understand. Words in a printed book were, to his thought, of a kind quite different from the sounds which expressed to him the things he saw around him. They were something which it was necessary to be able to say aloud, which clever boys could say easily, but which gave him a great deal of trouble to remember, and beyond this his mind had never reached; but this word "*steal*," which it had puzzled him so to recall, had set his thoughts, for the first time, to work.

That was what the boys wanted him to do who had asked him, only yesterday, to go with them at night and gather the apples in the Squire's orchard. He half consented, being pleased by the idea of showing them

how well he could climb ; he had thought it would be a good bit of fun. But what could this mean, "Thou shalt not steal" ? Who said so ? and had it anything to do with himself ?

Robin knew that when people were caught in the act of stealing they were sometimes sent to prison ; but right and wrong were words which he hardly understood. Yet there were some things which the boy could neither have been led nor forced to do ; he would never tell a lie, nor strike a boy smaller than himself, not hurt a dumb animal. When he saw Bob Symonds, the biggest boy in the school, trying to frighten little Lettice into giving him the ripe wood strawberries she had gathered for her brother, ill at home, did he not fly at him at once, furious and fearless, and so surprised the cowardly lad, that he was glad enough to get away, and leave Lettice to carry her leaf full of strawberries home quite safely, under Robin's proud escort ?

But these words, "Thou shalt not steal,"

brought quite a new idea into the narrow circle of Robin's thoughts. Who said them? he wondered. Who had the right to say them? Why shouldn't he steal if he liked? The boy began to wish for some one to tell him the meaning of the words he saw. A footstep coming through the wood made him look up from his book, and pushing aside a bough, he saw old Sally, with her basket of eggs, on the way to the cottage.

In a moment he scrambled down the tree, and was walking beside her. When they reached the door Robin pointed to the sentence over which he had been musing, and putting his lips to the old woman's ear, shouted in his loudest voice, "What does it mean?"

"Bless your heart," answered the old woman, testily, "I can hear you plain enough. 'Steal,' yes, 'thou shalt not steal;' that's how we used to say it when I was a girl."

"What does it mean?" shouted Robin again.

“Ah, you are right. I *have* heard it a many times. My little Tim, that's been dead this twenty years, and was a man when he died, he used to say them off as pretty—”

Robin could not wait for the end of the old woman's speech, but plucked at her sleeve and shouted, “Mean, mean!” into her ear so often, that at last she understood.

“‘Mean’; it means my cabbages that you wicked boys are always after, that I've no peace of my life for watching and worrying. I'm not meaning you, Robin, but boys do seem as if they were made for nothing but to plague an old woman like me.”

“The Squire's apples?” shouted Robin.

“Ah, yes,” said the old woman, thinking of the little tree in front of her own cottage, whose fast-ripening fruit she dreaded to see taken from her by her natural enemies, the village boys. “Apples or pears or what not, 'tis all one; 'tis put down here plain enough.”

“But who put it down here— who says it, Sally?”

The old woman's manner changed, and an uneasy look came over her stolid, expressionless face. "‘Who says it?’ Why, you might be a heathen, child, to ask such a question. Here, get me the hares, if father has got any, and let me be off. I shall be late in the market, else."

"Tell me who says it, Sally, and I'll get the things," said Robin, earnestly.

"I never knew such a boy," muttered the old woman, testily, "asking questions that a child of two years could answer; making as if you didn't know that it was God Almighty wrote the commandments. There, let me go; and now be sharp, I tell you, I've not a minute to spare."





CHAPTER II.

NOT AFRAID.

AFTER old Sally had left the cottage, Robin sat still for some time, thinking over what she had said. He had never been taught about God, and yet some few thoughts and ideas about Him had found their way into the boy's mind, but he had never till now looked at them, or tried to put them in order.

He believed that all the things about him—that he himself, and his father, and all the people in the village, had been made by God, and that this great God lived in

heaven, which he thought of as a place somewhere above the tops of the tallest pine trees, hidden in the pale blue of the distant sky. But it had never occurred to him that it was possible that God cared what he, a little boy, did, or watched him when he seemed quite alone under the shadow of the wood, or had cared to write down words to tell him what was right and what was wrong; for he believed the old woman's words quite simply, and thought that, somehow or other, the very pages he held had been written by God for him.

And because, written on Robin's heart, as on the heart of all the children of the great Father, there were thoughts which answered to the words which the finger of God once wrote upon the tables of stone, the boy felt at once that this command was one that he was bound henceforth to obey. In a certain sense he had shown this before he read the words "Thou shalt not steal;" but he had contrived to silence his conscience by using some other word than steal

when he thought of taking the Squire's apples; but now it looked quite different, and Robin made up his mind that he would have nothing to do with it.

"They may say what they like; they may frighten me or beat me," said the boy to himself; "but what I mean I'll do, and what I say I'll stand to; and I'll have nothing to do with stealing Squire's apples." Robin got up from the ground and clenched his fists sturdily; but at that moment a fir-cone struck him right on the cheek, and, looking angrily round, he saw the laughing face of Jonas Raby peeping out from behind the stem of a tree a few yards distant. Jonas was the only boy whom Robin liked, the only one with whom he ever talked at all, and it was he who had brought him the request of the other boys that he would come with them, as he was such a good climber, and help to strip the Squire's fruit trees.

"I say, Robin," said Jonas, coming nearer, and throwing himself down on the grass by

his companion's side, "are you game to go to-night? Bliss heard his father saying how the trees were to be cleared to-morrow—cleared, and fruit sold in the market, for Squire is off to foreign parts; but, bless you, we'll save them the trouble, won't us, lad?"

"I'm not going with you," said Robin, sitting bolt upright.

"Why, what's up now?" cried Jonas, looking at Robin. "What's to hinder? you've never been and let on to father, surely?"

"I don't tell tales," answered Robin, angrily. "Father knows nought about it, but I've made up my mind not to go, so it's no use your asking me."

"Oh, but Robin," said the other boy in a coaxing tone, and passing his arm round his companion's neck, "you *must* come; it won't be half the fun without you, and you don't know how sweet the apples are: they are so large and rosy, it makes my mouth water to look at them."

Robin did not answer for a moment, he was thinking how pleasant it would be to bring home a store of these apples, to eat under the trees; and while he hesitated Jonas went on.

“There’s none of the other boys believe about your climbing and that. They say you can’t do nothing, and I want to show them different; if you cry off now they’ll say you are a coward, Robin, lad.”

Robin hesitated more and more; this was so very different from the answer he had expected. He had thought of himself as defending himself bravely against the anger of a crowd of boys older and stronger than himself, of proving that no one could make him do anything but what he chose; but now Jonas was urging him in his pleasant friendly voice, and the other boys would say he was a coward if he didn’t go. A coward, indeed! he would like to show them. It was only this once, and taking apples wasn’t really like stealing anything else, and they belonged to the Squire, whom his father

hated so. Robin had almost made up his mind to yield.

It was a very important moment in little Robin's life ; he did not know it ; we scarcely ever do know the importance of such moments till they are long past, and then we can sometimes see how, for good or for evil, they have set their mark on our very souls. It was the first time in which the boy had ever, consciously and with open eyes, made his choice between right and wrong. He not only knew, but in his heart he felt, that it was wrong to steal ; that taking the Squire's apples was one of the things which God had forbidden in those pages which His finger had written, and that he must decide whether he would obey God, or just do what would please himself for the moment. He did not know anything about prayer, he did not know that God would give him, if he asked, strength to resist what was wrong ; and the boy was so nearly conquered, that he had turned to Jonas with a promise on his lips that he would come with them that

night, but the words were never spoken. God had pity on His child, and did not let him, in this his first fight, be tempted above that he was able.

For at this moment a rough shout made Robin start with sudden fear; but it was only a party of the boys coming to look for Jonas, and carry him off with them for a bathe in the little river before afternoon school.

"Come you along, old chap," said the first of the new-comers, pulling Jonas up from the grass. "What's the use of wasting all your time here? that old bell will be going directly."

"Will you come, or will you not, that's all about it?" he added, turning to Robin.

"Come, I should think he would come," said another of the boys. "Do you think we should tell all our plans, and let him off taking his share? He'll come, or I'll soon make him, that's all."

"I should like to see you," said Robin, getting up from the grass. "Now look you

here, I'll not let on, I'll never say one word, but I'm not a-going with you, and so I tell you."

"There'll be two words to that," said the boy who had spoken last, seizing Robin by the collar, but Jonas interposed. "Let him alone, you stupid, he'll come fast enough, if you'll only be quiet. Don't be a fool," whispered he, drawing Robin a little aside; "you know what they'll say if you don't come."

"We can't waste all our time here," said another. "Tell us why you won't go, Robin; no one will find out; there's never any one in the orchard of nights; I tell you, you needn't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," answered Robin, sturdily, drawing himself to his full height. "I won't go because I've got a book that God Almighty wrote, and it says right plain I'm not to steal."

There was a loud sneering laugh from most of the boys, only Jonas looked a little uneasy. "Is it your father's son that's turning saint?" cried Bob Symonds.

“Turning sneak, I call it,” said another ;
“but I’ll be even with you. I know what your father said at the public, night afore last. He’d better mind hisself, he had ; firing corn-ricks is worse a deal than stealing a few apples.”

“There *is* father,” cried Robin, suddenly ;
“you’d best be off, I can tell you ;” and the boys evidently thought so too, for before the distant figure, which Robin’s quick eyes had discovered, reached the edge of the clearing they had scampered back the other way as silently as possible, and Robin was standing alone under the tree when his father came up.

The boy was full of wonder as to what had brought him home at such an unusual hour, but he dare not ask, for he saw by his father’s angry frown that whatever had happened had made him even more sullen and uncommunicative than usual.

The man sat down on a chair by the cottage door, and lit his short pipe, remaining there till the afternoon shadows had fallen

till the sun had set in a blaze of crimson and gold behind the red stems of the fir trees: till Robin, tired, had come in from the wood, and the old woman, returned from market, had cooked and set on the table the savory supper. By the time the dish was empty, and Grip was enjoying the bones on the floor, the man's face had cleared a little; and as soon as old Sally was gone, Robin ventured to ask timidly whether the Squire had been angry about the hare.

"I saw nought of Squire," answered the man, "and I hope I shall never see his face again, or I shall do him a mischief. No, boy, 'tis not the hare, but I tell you I'm turned off, I that have been on the land these nine years, and looked to end my days here."

"Perhaps if you asked Squire," began Robin; but his father interrupted him, bringing his heavy fist down on the little table before him, till the wood almost cracked with the stroke.

"Squire is off to foreign parts, gone or

going, 'tis all one ; he has not the heart of a man nor the courage of a man neither : he turns us off just when the harvest has nigh failed, and bread is rose, so that a poor man scarce knows the comfort of a full meal. But he has nought to say, not he, to the men that have dug and ploughed and reaped for him till all the best of their strength is gone ; they may get bread where they can, or starve where they please, while he makes his good corn-fields into pasture. 'Ask Squire,' indeed : he'd take no heed to me ; but he *shall* hear me, and heed me too," cried the man, fiercely.

"Oh, father," said Robin, creeping nearer, until he could lay his hand on his father's knee, "don't go and do anything wrong, please don't. We can live here, and eat what you find of nights ; we shan't starve ; though I wonder," thought Robin, "whether that is stealing too."

"We must turn out of this cottage, come Tuesday. Robin, you were never such a fool as to think we could stay here, now

I'm turned off the land. We must be off on our travels, lad, like Squire, though may be 'twill be no farther than the nighest work-house."

"Go away from here?" cried Robin, in sudden and utter dismay. He said no more, but his great black wondering eyes slowly filled with tears, and he crept away towards the open door, longing to be alone, where no one would hear the sobs which seemed almost to choke him as he tried to keep them back.

Robin ran through the leafy darkness of the wood until he reached a spot which he knew well, a soft cushion of moss covering the roots of a mighty beech tree, and there he flung himself on the ground, and buried his face in his hands. He had never been so miserable before, and yet he scarcely understood the cause of his misery, for though he could say over and over to himself, "We are going away, going away," yet the idea was only faintly grasped by his mind. For as Robin had never known any other home,

scarcely seen any place beyond the wood in which his days were passed, so the thought of going into the unknown distances beyond brought with it nothing but a vague cold terror.

How he loved the cottage and the wood ! The birds would come next spring, and build under the little window, and some one else would be there, who would perhaps break the eggs, and frighten away the old birds. The little squirrel that had grown so tame that it would come down the tree when Robin called, and take a nut from his fingers, would forget him, and grow wild once more, or perhaps would be taken and killed by Bob Symonds, or some other cruel boy. And those very boys ; he remembered how they had laughed at him, and called him sneak only that morning (could it be that morning ? it seemed so long ago) ; they would never know now that he was not afraid. Even Jonas would think him a coward, and he had meant to do some very brave thing, that would show them that it

wasn't fear that had kept him from stealing the apples; and, worst of all, little Lettice would hear what they said; and Robin sobbed more than ever as he thought of the little golden-haired child whom he loved, because she was so small and weak.

Something cold touching his wet cheek made Robin start with fear, but it was only Grip, who sat down whining by the boy's side, anxious to soothe the grief which distressed him.

'We are going, Grip,' cried Robin, throwing both his arms round the dog's neck, 'but we won't leave you behind; you shall go with us, Grip, wherever it is.'

'Ay, ay, Grip shall go;' and Robin, looking up at the words, saw his father standing by him. He jumped up quickly, and tried to brush away the traces of tears.

'Don't be a fool,' said the man, but not in an unkind tone. 'The world's a big place, Robin. You are young, you'll see many a spot you'll like better than this wood; 'tis different for me; I thought to

end my days here ; but 'twill all go to one account. Let Squire look out, I say," and the fierce look came back.

"Please don't do anything wrong," pleaded Robin once more.

"Who has taught you anything about right and wrong, I should like to know?" answered the father. "Never you mind my concerns, but be off to bed with you; 'tis near upon eight o'clock." And the boy crept off, a little comforted by his father's gentler tone, and lay down to forget his griefs in the sound sleep of a tired child.

Poor Robin! he did not yet know that he had a Father in heaven to whom he might have told his trouble: that there was, stretched out even over him, a poor ignorant child, the tender care and protection of God; that, though he felt so lonely, sobbing himself to sleep upon his pillow, the heart of the great God who made him knew and cared for his sorrow.



CHAPTER III.

THE WORLD OUTSIDE THE WOOD.

ROBIN slept late the next morning, and when he woke it was with a sense that something strange had happened, though he could not at first remember what it was. As recollection came slowly back to his mind, it brought with it a feeling by no means so sad as that which had weighed on his heart as he lay down to sleep. He began to feel something like pleasure at the idea of change, and his busy thoughts were already picturing the wonderful adventures which might lie for him beyond the shadows of the wood, beyond the village, beyond the river and the hills

behind, which up to this time had bounded his world. He felt sure his father would be kinder to him; he spoke quite gently last night; and perhaps he would even let him go to school and learn, when once he was away from Bob Symonds and the other boys of the village. Then he would soon show if he were a dunce; he would become a great scholar, and a rich man perhaps, and by-and-by he would come back; and how Jonas and the rest would look to see him going in fine clothes, like a gentleman, to see Lettice and her mother.

Busy with such fancies, Robin dressed, and went down the ladder staircase to the little kitchen. His father was not there, and Robin saw that he had made his breakfast for himself before he went. "Father is right kind," said the boy to himself; "he never waked me, though I ought to have been up this two hours. I'll look sharp another morning, though."

"Poor father, he'll be lonesome like when he is turned out of the cottage," went on

Robin to himself, as he ate his bread, and drank from a basin of milk which had been left for him on the table. "I mean to be good to him, I do; he has had a deal to put him out, and I'm the only one he has got to care for him, except old Sally, and father don't think much of her. I wonder if Sally knows we are going; it will take a deal of breath to make her understand, but I'll try, for I hear her coming through the wood." But though the footsteps stopped at the cottage door, the visitor knocked, instead of lifting the latch, as the old woman would have done, and when Robin opened it, there stood his old friend the packman, stooping under his heavy load.

"I can read it all right out," cried Robin, without stopping for a word of greeting; "you come in and sit down and hearken:" and before the astonished visitor had understood the meaning of this unusual greeting, the boy was half-way through the commandments, which he read in a loud, unvarying voice, that showed but little comprehension of the meaning of the words which he used.

"Ay, ay, I'm getting hold of it now," said his friend, when Robin stopped, out of breath, but with a look of triumph and delight. "You are the lad I gave a bit of print to six months ago come Michaelmas. And so you've learned to read it. Well done, I say; but have you got hold of the sense of the words? There's more in them than the sound, my lad."

"I know God Almighty wrote them," said the boy, "and I know what this means;" and he passed his finger down the page until he had found the eighth commandment, and held it before the man's eyes as he went on. "It means I mustn't touch Squire's apples, nor old Sally's cabbages; not that I would be so mean as to go for to take them, but she will have it that some of the boys do."

"That's well enough," answered the packman, smiling. "And have you made out any of the others?"

"No," said Robin, "I never thought about them. "Do they all say there's something I mustn't do?"

ing work; maybe I shall be gone two ~~days~~, maybe best part of a week; but say nothing to any one, except that I'm off, tramping high and low for work; and you need not say that much unless they come asking you. Folks have precious little business of their own to attend to, they take such heed of mine."

Robin would have liked to have gone with his father; he did not like the prospect of the loneliness and long waiting; but he knew his father's voice and manner so well as to be quite sure that just now it was better to listen in silence. But when he was really gone, when the last echo of his footsteps had died away, then the little boy sat on the floor and sobbed aloud, partly dreading the lonely days and nights, partly feeling the chill of disappointment after his awakened hopes of a happier life.

As the darkness came on, bringing with it no familiar step, no voice to break the silence, Robin thought that he had never been so lonely before. He sat with his arm

round Grip, nestling his face against the dog's close black curls, too frightened to dare even to creep to his little bed up-stairs. "Oh, Grip, Grip! how I do wish there was any one to take care of us," he said, half aloud; and the words seemed to repeat themselves over again in the silence, without any will of his own. Presently they brought some other words with them, some words he must surely have heard somewhere, or how should they ever have come into his mind? — "Pray God take care of us all to-night." Ah, he remembered now where he had heard them. Little Lettice said them to him once; she had repeated to him her evening prayer, and asked him if he would not like to learn it, and he had said, "No, he didn't mind about it;" for at the time he had thought that prayers were only for little girls, and were no use at all to strong boys of twelve who could take care of themselves.

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But now he almost wished he had learnt the prayer. He would have said it, and

perhaps he should not have felt so much afraid then; at any rate, he could say the words he knew, and perhaps God would hear them, and not let any one find out that his father was away, and come and frighten him.

So little Robin knelt, with his arm still round the dog, and said in a low whisper, "Pray God take care of Grip and me to-night." It was his first prayer, and he scarcely understood why he said it, or who it was that would hear and help; but yet he felt comforted and soothed, and with his faithful companion for a pillow, he soon fell asleep on the cottage floor, and did not wake till the bright summer sun was shining full through the uncurtained window.





CHAPTER IV.

FIRE AT THE FARM.

BEFORE the next evening came Robin found himself wishing many a time that some of the boys would come to the cottage, if it were only to tease him ; it would not frighten him nearly so much as this long loneliness ; but yet when, towards the middle of the night, he was awakened by sounds of feet and voices, and Grip's short, uneasy barks, it was with some fear that he crept across the floor to the window, to see if he could make out the cause of the disturbance. But only the shadowy trees moved slowly in the darkness, though the shouting and the cries grew louder.

Robin drew the bolt of the door, and, calling Grip to his side, ran as fast as he could towards the place whence the sounds seemed to come—the Squire's model farm on the edge of the wood. The narrow mossy path, dark at first, grew strangely distinct as he hastened on; and presently, as the wind waved aside the branches of the trees, he saw beyond him a vivid dancing light, that seemed to redden all the gloomy sky. There must be a fire at the farm, thought Robin; but as he came through the more sparsely-planted trees to the cleared fields he saw that it was not the farm, but the newly-raised stacks of corn which were blazing, and which gave this fierce light. Groups of laborers were there, hastily wakened from their heavy slumbers, some of them busy enough throwing buckets of water on the blaze, which seemed to lick it up, and next moment leap up even more fiercely, while some stood a little apart, whispering to each other, and lent no hand to help. A sound of wheels

and horses' feet, and the little engine from the Hall came up at full speed. Three stacks at least were on fire, but there were several more as yet untouched, and the chief anxiety was to save these. But the hot autumn weather, which had so early dried and ripened the corn, had wasted the water in the little springs and dried up the pools, while even the great pond at the farm, at which the cattle drank, had sunk down till you saw now only a hollow full of wet and trodden mud. Buckets must be passed from the well, which was at least two hundred yards distant, and the bailiff and the village constable called on every one present, men and boys, to form a long line, and pass on the buckets from one to another.

Robin pressed forward, eager to show that he was not too small to be of use, and too full of wonder, dismay, and interest at the new scene, to notice the strange glances which were cast on him by the other helpers. But no sooner had he taken his place

than he felt a strong hand on his collar, and found himself pulled violently aside by the Squire's bailiff—the man of all others whom Robin had been taught most to dislike and dread. He looked up in terror as his captor shook him angrily, and calling to the constable, said, “Here, lock this chap up till the fire's out, and then bring him up to me.” Robin's thoughts flew at once to the apples; could the other boys have taken them, and was he suspected after all? “Oh, indeed, indeed, mister!” he cried, as the constable dragged him away, “I didn't go near the apples, I never so much as touched one.” The constable was far too anxious to get back to trouble himself to answer. He dragged Robin after him to his own cottage, and bidding his wife look to the boy, for the bailiff must have speech of him in the morning, he hurried away; while the woman, anxious to see what was going on, locked Robin securely in the little empty tool-house, and followed her husband to the scene of the fire.

To the poor boy, frightened and miserable, it seemed a very, very long time before morning came; and when the door was opened at last, he had to cover his dazzled eyes before he could at all make out the figure of the constable, who stood in the doorway, a dark form against the vivid morning light. To Robin, this man, familiarly known as Nathan Roberts, had never seemed before at all formidable; he had thought of him as a rather soft, good-tempered man, who was accustomed to be very meek and respectful in the presence of his tall loud-voiced "missus," and to assert himself now and then by collaring and shaking a boy who was caught birds'-nesting, or who was looking over the hedge at his neighbor's fruit. But now Robin looked at him with awe and shrinking, for he represented in some manner that unknown terrible law, into the hands of which Robin felt that he had fallen. Yet the constable's appearance was even less impressive than usual, for his hurried wash had by no

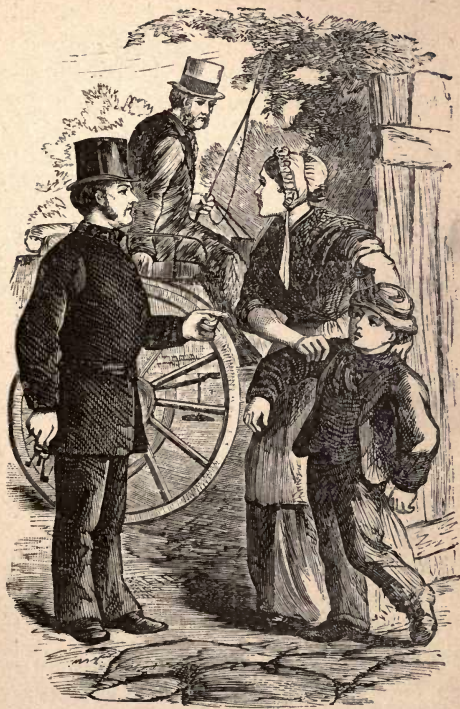
means removed the black traces of the fire on face and garments, and he looked jaded and tired after his last night's anxiety and work.

"Come out and behave yourself," he said; "you'll catch it this time, you will, you young rascal."

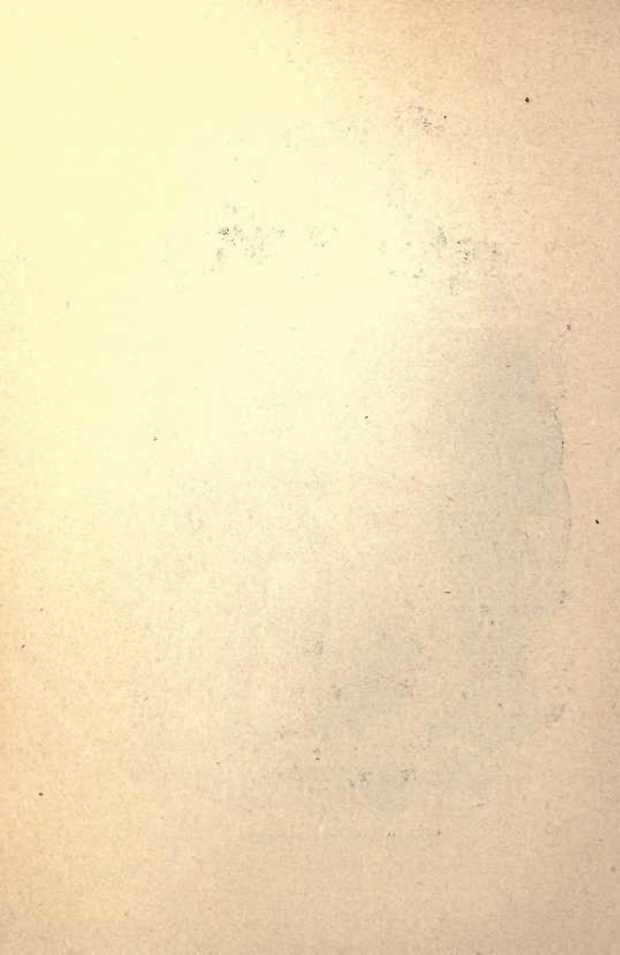
Robin crawled out into the sunshine, downcast and miserable, a state of mind in no way improved by his being immediately collared by the constable's wife, and dragged to the side of a gig, in which sat the Squire's bailiff.

"That's the boy, is it, Mrs. Roberts? He looks bad enough and daring enough for anything," remarked the bailiff, as he glanced at Robin, who with sullen, downcast look, was trying hard to wriggle himself free from the woman's rough grasp.

"That's the boy, Mr. Pierson, sir; and to my thinking he's at the bottom of the whole mischief; for a more ill-conditioned heathen of a boy I never saw in all my born days," giving him a shake as she spoke.



Robin in Trouble. — Page 54.



“Nay, nay, wife,” said the constable, mildly, shaking his head, “I know nothing so bad of the boy; but he’s had bad training and bad example, sir,” (appealing to Mr. Pierson), “and what’s bred in the bone, you know—”

“‘You know,’ indeed,” interrupted Mrs. Roberts. “I wonder you’ve the face to go on talking, I do; and you that let the man get away when you had your hand on his very collar. The men are but poor things, sir; if they’d make the women constables, ’tis not much you’d hear of rick-burning, I can tell you.”

“I have no doubt you would make a good one, Mrs. Roberts,” said the bailiff, laughing. “But come, my man, hand the boy up here, and get in yourself; I shall want you to give your account of the matter to Squire Bevan. We shall just be in time to see him after his breakfast;” and touching his horse with the end of his lash, they had soon left the village far behind.

It was like a distant journey to Robin;

he had never before been so far from his home: for Squire Bevan lived five miles off, though he was the nearest magistrate, now that their own Squire was abroad. The boy would have enjoyed this new way of travelling, for he had never ridden before, except on the heavy trunks of the trees as they were dragged by the slow horses from the wood; but he was faint for want of food, and, for all his sullen air, his heart was beating with terror at the thought of Squire Bevan. He should be sent to jail, perhaps, or beyond seas (for he had a very vague idea of the power of a Squire), and never see Grip, or his father, or little Lettice, or old Sally, any more.

Squire Bevan was seated in his library, wearing a gorgeous dressing-gown, which Robin looked on as probably his robe of office, and which gave an additional solemnity to his feelings, as, closely guarded by the constable, he stood before him.

The bailiff was speaking very fast, and Robin could understand a little of the

meaning of what he said ; but he soon found out that he was suspected of being concerned, not in the theft of the apples, but in the fire.

“And you are certain it was the boy’s father who fired the ricks?” asked Mr. Bevan of the constable.

“Certain sure, Squire,” answered the constable. “The way of it was this. I was looking round before I turned in—it might be about eleven, or it might be half after—and I saw a light no bigger than a lucifer match a-moving among the ricks. Thinks I, ‘My fine fellow, don’t you make too sure ; I’ll be even with you ;’ for what with the Squire’s going to foreign parts, and what with the men being turned off the land, there had been many an angry word spoke, and I guessed the meaning of the light the minute I clapped eyes on it.”

“Go on, constable,” said Mr. Bevan, as the man paused to give the magistrate an opportunity of being duly impressed with the unusual sagacity of the Wareham constable.

“Well, Squire,” in the slightly injured tone of unappreciated merit, “so I stole as soft as might be round one of the ricks, and came right on my man, just as he was for putting his match into the corn. There was some loose straw made a blaze, and I saw his face as plain as I see yours, and it was Wallack, this boy’s father—a well-known man he is for poaching and setting lines in the water, and one of the very men the Squire had turned off.”

“Now, constable, be very sure of what you say; you have no doubt whatever that you recognized this man? Remember, arson is a serious matter.”

“I tell you, sir,” answered Nathan, earnestly, “I see him as plain and as nigh as I see you; and I had another token that it was Wallack, though none was needed; for no sooner did I put my hand on his collar, to arrest him, sir, as was my bounden duty as a constable and a man, but he gets hold of me, twists his foot round in some fashion that he learnt in Cornish parts, they tell me,

for he is a foreigner is Wallack, and was off, leaving me down on the heap of straw, and the rick all of a blaze."

"And this boy was with his father, I suppose?"

"I can't say I saw him, sir," said the constable, "but he might have been, like enough."

"I saw him myself busy enough at the fire a few hours after," said Mr. Pierson. "I warrant you he knows where his father is now."

"Listen to me, my boy," said Mr. Bevan, for the first time speaking to Robin, who was looking down on the floor uneasily, and shifting from one foot to the other, "and be sure you speak the truth."

Robin lifted his eyes from the carpet, and looked the magistrate full in the face, but he did not speak.

"Where is your father now?"

"Tramping high and low for work," replied Robin, using the very words in which he had been bidden to answer any questions.

"How long has he been gone?"

"Since Thursday noon," said the boy; "and I've spoke the truth, as you bid me, but I'm not to say one word more."

"Do you know who you are speaking to, boy?" said Mr. Pierson, angrily. "Bring none of your impertinence here, or it will be all the worse for you."

"Father said," continued Robin, looking at Mr. Bevan, and not at the bailiff, "as I was to say no more than he was gone on tramp for work; and I'm bound to do as he tells me, sir."

"I'll soon find a way to cure his obstinacy, sir, if you'll allow me to deal with him," said Mr. Pierson. "Another night in Nathan's tool-house will make him change his tone, I'll warrant."

"Excuse me, Mr. Pierson," said the magistrate, in a somewhat constrained voice, "the case is in my hands. I shall know how to deal with it."

"No one better," replied Mr. Pierson, turning aside to hide his look of annoyance

at the rebuke, and adding this to his causes of offence against Robin, whom he already disliked as the son of the man whose act was sure to bring him into disgrace with his employer.

“This boy,” said the Squire, “is too young, and evidently too ignorant to be subpœnaed as a witness, and there is no pretence for putting him in confinement, as he does not appear to have been present when his father committed this crime. We have no alternative but to dismiss him. Boy, you are at liberty — you can go.”

Robin made a sort of duck with his head to serve as a bow, and was backing towards the door, too confused and helpless even to wonder where he was to go; but before he reached it, faint with want of food, and dizzy with fear and suspense, he turned very white, and would have fallen had not Nathan grasped his arm.

The Squire seemed to understand the case at once. “Carry him to the servant’s hall, constable, and tell them to give him a good breakfast of bread and meat.”

Some hours after, when Mr. Pierson had long since driven away, carrying Nathan in his gig, Robin was summoned once more into the Squire's presence. He was no longer faint and hungry, and felt much bolder as the gentleman beckoned to him to come and stand beside his chair.

"My boy," said his new friend, in grave but not unkindly tones, "I do not blame you for being silent about your father; but tell me, are you always as careful to obey the words of your Father in heaven?"

Robin looked at his questioner in puzzled silence, the words were too strange to have any meaning for him.

"Do you try to obey God as well as your father?"

This time he understood, and the answer came readily. "I know that God said on the paper that I was to honor my father, and that was why I wouldn't tell any more than he bid me."

"Then, my boy, you have learnt the first lesson of life—obedience—because God

tells us to obey; but perhaps you have found out too that it is sometimes very difficult to do just what God tells us?"

"Ay," said Robin, with an emphatic nod of his head; "and sometimes folks over-persuade one, and it looks as if it would be so nice, sir."

"Indeed it does," replied Mr. Bevan, gently. "And God knows exactly how we feel, and how weak we are: and if He sees any one really trying to do what is right, because He has bidden them, then He is sure to help. He makes us stronger, so that we are able to turn away from the wrong thing that looks so nice, and not to listen when other people would over-persuade us. You must speak to God in your heart, my boy, when you find it hard to obey Him."

"I did say would He take care of me when father left me all alone; and I think He heard, for I wasn't frightened any more," said Robin.


"Speak to God very often, my boy.

And now I cannot talk to you any more, but I will give you a little Testament of your own. That is a book in which God speaks to us, and tells us how He loves us ;” and Mr. Bevan took down a little square book in plain strong binding, which he put into Robin’s hands. The boy had no words in which to speak his thanks, but the sudden color in his brown cheeks, and the light in his eyes, told of his eager gladness, as he took the book carefully and reverently, and folded it under his jacket. And it was not till he had walked some distance from the Hall that he remembered how lonely and desolate he was, his father away in some distant place, afraid to come home, lest he should be taken, and he himself suspected by every one, and almost friendless and unknown, even in his own village. But the child’s heart grew very heavy as he crept along the dreary miles of road towards his own empty cottage.



CHAPTER V.

BY THE RIVER SIDE.

BOUT noon on the 24th of December, two travellers, who looked both footsore and cold, were entering London by one of the main roads along which fifty years ago the mail coaches used to run.

One of the travellers was evidently a peddler, for he carried a large pack on his shoulders, while lagging behind the long steps of his companion was a boy with brown face and tangled black hair, whom we last saw three months ago creeping towards his empty cottage. I said "two travellers," but presently, at a whistle from

the boy, a large black dog sprang over the hedge, and putting his nose to his master's hand, in sign of greeting, trotted on steadily by his side.

"Beat at last, are you, Robin?" said the packman, looking round. "Well, I must say you've kept up like a man; you never did such a spell of walking in *your* life before, I'll warrant. But we'll soon be in good quarters. Hold up, boy, else I'll have my brother saying 'tis but a bad bargain I've brought him."

"I'm not beat," said the boy, straightening himself, and pressing forward to his companion's side; "but it's such a big place, and I'm getting afraid Mr. Barnaby shouldn't like Grip and me."

"Hallo! I declare, that beats all," cried the peddler, suddenly; "there's Jacob himself. There never was such a place as London for meeting folks as well as losing them;" and he hurried over to the opposite side of the street, where stood a little wiry old man in patched, faded garments. of a

make which, added to his sou'-wester, gave him a sea-going air, quite out of character with the narrow London street in which he stood.

"Well met, brother Jacob; you're a good sight for sore eyes," said the peddler, heartily, clapping the old man on the shoulder.

"Humph," answered the other, in a sharp tone, which made Robin try to shrink out of sight behind his friend; "you're no younger and no handsomer than you were when I saw you last."

"Three years' walking about in all weathers don't improve a man's complexion, and I was never much to boast of," said the other, cheerily.

"I hate to hear a fellow undervally himself," replied the old man. "Did you make your own face, that you're so modest about your looks?"

"Well, well," returned the peddler, laughing, "you're not changed, anyways, Jacob; and, talking about handsome looks,

what do you say to this fine fellow? Grip his name is; you'll not see his pattern on this side the river."

"I don't go much by looks myself," grunted the old man, though in a more complacent tone. "And that's the boy, I suppose. Well, young fellow, I can tell you 'tis a good thing for you that I *don't* go by looks; I must have a good word with you. Come along, brother, the *Nicholas* is moored close alongside here;" and the sailor, for such he seemed, said not another word as he led the party through many a narrow street and turning, until they reached the river side, near which were moored many of those flat boats or lighters in which goods are carried out to the larger ships, nearer the mouth of the river. Across more than one plank, laid from boat to boat, Robin followed his conductors, and at last stood on the deck of the *Nicholas*, of which his new acquaintance was owner and captain. A short ladder led into a tiny cabin, round which Robin

gazed with wondering eyes, for the walls were almost covered with strange objects, the nature of which he could only guess. Two or three dried skins of creatures such as the boy had never seen, gleaming pearly shells, and bottles which contained snakes covered with wonderful markings: while on one side a little model of a canoe was nailed upon the wall close to a polished spear-head glistening with rows of dangerous teeth. The old man was a favorite amongst the sailors, and when they came into port from their long voyages, many a one would bring him some little gift from the foreign lands which they had visited, to adorn his cabin walls.

Jacob Barnaby seated himself on a bench which was fastened to the wall, and signing to his brother to do the same, he called Robin to stand before him. "Now, boy," he said "you must speak up and answer what I ask you. I've heard summat of you, but it was in a letter, and I've not much patience to make them out. I know

about your father, and how you were left alone; you need not tell me that," he continued, with a real kindness, which showed that a warm heart lay hidden under the rough manner. "The bailiff locked up the cottage, and took the bits of sticks for the rent, and turned you adrift. I know that much; what came next?"

"I went to look for father," said Robin, "but I never found him; and I should have been starved many a time, but folks were good to me, and gave me a drink of milk, or a bit of their own dinner of bread and cheese, and at night I slept under a hayrick, when I could find one. But one day I hadn't had a morsel since the night before, and when evening came I was nigh worn out, and I dropped down by the roadside in a sleep or a faint; and when I came to myself I was in a warm house, and he," pointing to the peddler, "was giving me some hot tea to drink."

"And a long time you were coming to," interrupted the peddler. "I began to have

my doubts if I hadn't found him too late, I can tell you, brother Jacob."

"And he said," went on Robin, presently, "would I sell my dog? for he had a brother in London wanted one like Grip, to look after his place when he was away; but I couldn't;" and the tears came into the boy's eyes. "I had no one else but Grip, and indeed, sir, he wouldn't have liked to go away; he's used to me, you see. And then he said maybe if I behaved myself you would take me with the dog, and so I came along with him to London; and, master, do please take us both. I'll do my best to learn all you tell me, and I won't eat much, I promise you."

A queer twinkle came into the old man's eyes.

"Well, well, boy, we'll see about it. You shall stay here a bit, any way, till I've had a look at the dog. And now there's nothing going on to-day, you may be off on shore, and look at the shops, and what not. There's a deal of holly in the windows, and

plums and candy for the puddings. You go and look at them. Or, stay! Do you see that church?" and Jacob pointed to an old gray tower, which seemed to rise close to the water side. "Steer for that tower; you'll find my lad Nicholas in the church; you can tell him I sent you."

"And bring him back with you to see his uncle," cried the peddler, as Robin turned to go. "He'll have grown a little stronger in these three years?" he continued, looking questioningly at Jacob as he spoke.

"He's an active chap is Nicholas. He gets about so quick with his crutch, you'd never think he was lame. 'Tis a wonder he's not spoiled, the gentry make so much of his fine music; but he is a good boy, and the comfort of my life since his poor mother died. Hallo!" with a sudden change of tone; "be off, boy, or you'll not find him in the church; 'tis getting late."

Robin saw that the two men wanted to be alone, and he was obliged to go, though

he was afraid to venture alone into those strange streets; but soon all fear was forgotten in wonder at the new sights which everywhere met his eye — greatest wonder of all, the crowds of people that passed continually up and down the narrow streets. He stood still to gaze at them, and decided that there must be some wonderful show near at hand, to which all these people were crowding. Robin found himself, after a time, at the closed doors of the old gray church, and he was going to sit down on one of the long stone steps which led up to the porch, to wait till Nicholas should come out, when he noticed that there was a narrow alley running down one side of the building, and in this he found a small door, which was not fastened, but yielded to his first timid push. It was not very cold weather for Christmas, but as the boy stepped into the dim light of the lofty, silent church, a strange chill passed over him.

Inside were no bright holly-berries, no

shining laurel. The old city church held on Sundays a mixed congregation of sailors and a very miscellaneous water-side population, and no one had ever thought of dressing the old oak pews for Christmas. The windows were crusted with dust and smoke, and Robin, whose only experience of churches was of the pretty country ones to which the peddler had sometimes taken him on their long slow journey to London, thought this a very dreary place in which to worship God.

But presently low sweet notes echoed through the building, so soft, so tender, they spoke to the heart like the remembrance of a dear voice that has been long silent; now louder tones, thrilling with passionate feeling, as the organ answered to every touch of the fingers that were laid on it. Robin forgot his errand, he forgot everything but the music, as he crept nearer to the wonderful sound, and sat down, quite unconscious even of his own movements, at the foot of the narrow stairs leading to the

organ-loft. How long he sat he did not know. He did not seem to himself to be listening to the music; rather his thoughts were gone back to his old life, to his father, to his sorrow at being parted from him, to his fear lest he should be even now longing for the little boy who could not come to him (for Robin never believed that his father had left him willingly), to all his new desires after a better life, his new consciousness of his own weakness. He could not separate and understand his own thoughts any more than he could detect the several notes which formed the cadence that he heard; but longing and sorrow and gladness and hope were all blended together, till the boy could bear no more, and bending his head over his knees, burst into sudden tears.

He did not hear the music cease, nor the sound of a crutch on the stairs above him; but presently he felt the touch of a hand on his shoulder, and a gentle voice said, "Do tell me what is the matter; why do you cry so?"

“Because I want to be a better boy, and I don’t know how, and father is gone away.” Robin had not thought the words before he said them, he scarcely knew indeed why he did cry, nor what had wakened in his heart the yearning desire for which he was trying to find words; but it had been growing in him day by day, as the new sorrow and the new tenderness which had entered his life had brought with them strange feelings and desires. God in His love and goodness had sown a seed in the boy’s heart, and what he felt was the awakening into life and growth of this power within him.

His new friend sat down on the stairs by Robin, and put his arm round his shoulders. “Tell me more about it,” he said gently.

Both touch and words were a new experience to the lonely boy; so few had ever cared to speak kindly to him; none before had seemed to wish to win his confidence; and this was a boy too, like himself, for the slight figure and colorless face of the crippled lad made him seem much younger than

he really was. Robin was naturally a very open-hearted boy, but he was so unaccustomed to talk or even to think of his own feelings, that it was some time before he found any words in which to answer.

"How did you come in here?" asked the crippled lad, presently, finding that his new acquaintance did not speak.

"At yon small door," replied Robin, readily. "Your father said as I should find you here. I'm Robin Wallack, the boy that was to come along of the dog."

"I'm so glad it's you," said Nicholas; "for I think we shall be friends. And haven't you heard of your father all this time? Poor Robin! I'm so sorry for you."

"You see," said Robin, confidentially, "I know a deal more now than I did when I lived along with father; your uncle have learnt me a many things; and times I think, if I'd been a better boy, father wouldn't have gone; and I don't think father ever knew much about God, or he wouldn't have done what he did; and I want to go and tell

him. I think it would make him sorry. I know it did me."

"Perhaps by-and-by God will bring your father back," said Nicholas, gently; "and though you don't know where he is, God knows. Perhaps He is teaching him too."

"But I want to see him. I had always lived along of him, you know, and he was very good to me, was father;" for Robin's loving little heart had already forgotten everything but the occasional kindly moods and more genial tones which had made the bright spots in his life.

Nicholas did not answer, and Robin went on. "Ever since I have read my book, I have wanted father to know. He used to say times and again as God cared nought for poor folks like us, and didn't take any thought how we lived; and now I know how Jesus Christ was a poor boy like me, hungry sometimes, with no place to sleep in, and with people on the watch to do Him harm, though He was so good and loved them all, — oh," and his throat swelled with

a sob, — “it makes me love Him so, and I want father to know.”

The arm was drawn closer round Robin's neck. “I know,” said Nicholas; “I am thinking of it all day long. Sometimes when I come and practise here, I don't feel as if I were making the music myself, but as if,” and his tones sank to a whisper, “it were His voice speaking to me, and saying, ‘My poor boy, I love you, though you are crippled and weak and good for nothing.’ O Robin, he is so good, so good, I want to get near to Him and never leave Him.”

The two boys sat silent, with a sense of companionship and common love which warmed both their hearts, for Nicholas, too, had known, since his mother's death, a lonely boyhood. His father's deep love but seldom found any expression in words, though, during the fits of pain which sometimes befell the sickly boy, he would nurse him as tenderly as a woman. The short winter afternoon had quite closed in as the new friends sat talking on the stairs, and

the lamps which had been lit in the street without showed faint spots of light through the gathering mist.

“We must be going home now, Robin,” said Nicholas, putting one hand on Robin’s shoulder, as he rose and fitted his crutch to its place. I’m so glad it’s you. We’ll always be friends, won’t we?”

“If you’ll let me,” said Robin.





CHAPTER VI.

THE CABIN OF THE LIGHTER.

WHEN Christmas was over, the cold weather came suddenly, and Robin woke one morning to find every mast and rope on the river coated with frost. But in a few hours all was black and dismal, and as the boy rubbed with his coat-cuff the tiny pane of rough glass which served him for a window, he longed, with a bitter sense of loneliness and distance, to see through it the gleaming stems and snow-laden delicate twigs of the woods at home. Robin had cried himself to sleep the night before, for in spite of Nicholas's kindness the new life seemed to him very strange

and hard; and when he was alone in his little hammock, with Grip's nose just touching his hand as it hung over the side, grief for his father, and something like fear at being so far from everything he knew and loved, and dislike of the constant active work, so different from his idle days in the woods at home, seemed to make a trouble too heavy for his child's heart to bear.

But sometimes, even in the midst of his trouble, a thought would come into his mind that brought with it comfort and peace. A voice would seem to speak to him, as if God indeed said, "Little Robin, you are not alone, you are not forsaken; God cares for you, and knows all about you." And then he would fall happily asleep, with the tears yet wet on his face, and wake in the morning to begin with new hope his day's work.

His new master was not inclined to let the boy be idle. By the first gray light he must be on deck, shivering in his torn and scanty clothes, and with sand and stone and

stinging half-frozen water, must scrub once more to whiteness the boards that always looked, Robin thought, clean enough for a farm-house table. Then the fire must be lit and the kettle set on to boil, the cabin swept out and arranged with perfect neatness, and breakfast prepared. All day long there was always something for Robin to do. If the lighter was engaged as usual, in receiving and landing the cargo of merchantmen anchored in the wider mouth of the river, then the boy must help to lift heavy bales, or roll cask after cask along the planks to the shore, while Grip kept guard, watching his little master, as if he would have liked to help had he only known how. Robin was very tired at night, more tired than he remembered to have been after his longest birds'-nesting expeditions at home.

This first day of the frost was also the first day of the year, but to Robin it was something more than either of these, and he felt it to be a very important occasion, indeed, as he stood by his little window, rubbing it hard with his coat-cuff.

His friend the peddler had completed his purchases now, and was to set off again that afternoon on his long country rounds: and before he went it must be decided whether Robin should stay, or should go back with him again, as the good man had promised, in case the boy could not settle to his work. About twelve o'clock the captain, as Robin generally called his old master, put his head out of the cabin door, and shouted to Robin to come. The boy went down the little ladder, his heart beating, and his face almost pale with excitement. The peddler was there, and Nicholas stood leaning against the wall.

"Now, boy," said the captain, in his roughest tones, "best say your mind at once. I like your dog, and you are welcome to stay, and I'll find board for the two of you, and more decent clothes for you. But you must stay here two years before you'll be worth a penny over your cost to feed and clothe: so say your mind, and have done with it."

“Two years.” It seemed a lifetime to Robin, and all that time he should never see the woods nor the grass again. He would much rather wander about the country with Grip, and try to earn a few pence at field work. He could not stay, and with his hands nervously grasping his cap, he looked up to give the answer that would send him once more a homeless wanderer into the world. He looked up, and his glance fell on Nicholas, who was watching him with eyes that seemed to read his very thoughts, eyes that were full of tears now, and of anxious longing.

“Nicholas,” said Robin, suddenly, and forgetting all that he had meant to answer, “do you want me to stay?”

“Yes,” said Nicholas, earnestly.

“Then, captain, I’ll stay.”

“Please yourself,” said the old man, carelessly, though he watched the two with keen eyes.

“You’ve been very good to me, mister,” went on Robin, turning to his first friend;

“and please, if you ever meet father, to say as he’ll find me here; and do tell him it wastn’t my fault I came away from the cottage, for I was turned out.”

“Ay, ay, I’ll mind about it,” said the peddler, shaking Robin’s little brown hand. “No fear of my forgetting, and I should know his face if I saw him. I remember how sharp he took me up when he came into the cottage; there, there, never mind,” as an expression of some distress crossed the boy’s face, “I don’t bear malice.” He drew Robin a little aside, and went on in a lower tone, “I’m right glad you’ve made up your mind to stay; you feel a bit strange at first, I dare say, but here you have a home and friends, and the chance of learning. It’s a deal better than being a mere tramp about the country.”

“Yes,” said Robin, slowly, and with no very hopeful expression; and then, brightening, “and you know father may come any day.”

“See you,” said his friend, going on with

his own thoughts, and not taking any notice of Robin's words, "you may get the best of all learning here, if you will. Do you know what that is, boy? 'The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.' Take you heed to learn of Him now while you are young, and He gives you the opportunity; 'tis a great thing to live with those that serve God. 'Tis but little I have been able to teach you; I'm but an ignorant man myself; but pray to God to make you want to know more, and to prepare your heart to understand, and then He will teach you. The more you want to know, the more there is waiting for you to learn, and we shall never get to the end of learning, for the love of God is always beyond our thoughts."

"I will try to learn, indeed," answered Robin, and I'll say the prayer every night and morning that you taught me; and perhaps, when I know a good deal, I shall be able to teach father."

That evening, while the captain was gone on shore to look up an old messmate, the

two boys settled themselves cosily by the cabin fire. Work was over for the day, and Grip was keeping watch over the barrels on the deck, and it was with an unusual sense of leisure and contentment that Robin spread out his cold hands to the bright blaze.

"Poor old fellow," said Nicholas, touching, as he spoke, the torn sleeve, through which the boy's bare elbow showed plainly. "You and I are to go on shore to-morrow, and see about getting you a better rig-out. You'll like that, won't you?"

"Yes," replied Robin, tightening the clasp of his hands round his knees as he sat on the floor, and rocking himself backward and forward with a brightened face. "Tell us all about it; what shall you get?"

"Well," said Nicholas, smiling too, "I have been thinking it would be good fun to astonish my father, and get you rigged after a real sea-going fashion."

"Oh, Nicholas!" cried Robin, "you never mean a blue jersey?"

“Yes I do,” laughed Nicholas, as Robin’s eyes opened wider.

“And a sou’-wester?”

Nicholas nodded.

“And a blue handkerchief, and all that;” and Robin fairly leaped up with delight, and would have danced about the cabin floor, but there was clearly no room for anything of the kind.

“But will the captain like it?” he asked, presently, with some apprehension.

“Ay, that he will; ’twas a sore trial to him when I had to give them up, but when I began to play the organ, folks didn’t like it, and I was obliged to leave it off; but I saw it cut father deep, though he never said a word. Poor father, you’ll not think much of his sharp words when you know him better, Robin.”

“And shall I have a jersey and a sou’-wester?” repeated Robin, with a little laugh of shy pleasure.

“Ay, ay, we’ll make a regular salt of you; only you wait till to-morrow and see.”

"I wish Lettice could see me, and old Sally, and Jonas," laughed Robin. "But, oh, Nicholas," and his lip fell, and the smile left his face, "father won't know me when he comes; he'll never think of looking for me under a sou'-wester."

"No fear, Robin," answered Nicholas, gently. "If your father is like me he'd know your little brown face under any sort of cap; besides, you know, if he came here to find you, he would come and ask father about you."

"Oh yes," answered Robin, eagerly, "and the captain would say, 'There he is,' and father would look, and take me for a sailor; and I should hear him speak, and come running to him, and then—" and the boy's voice was lost in a sob.

"Come now," said Nicholas, presently, "we've been talking about your plans, now I'm going to tell you some of mine; what do you think of my setting up a school, Robin?"

"Why you are not half big enough," said

Robin, looking up at the slight, bent, weakly figure before him. "Bob Symonds could lick you with one hand, I know he could. I'm only a little chap, but I'm stronger than you."

"And you think a schoolmaster must be strong enough to thrash all the boys, do you? Well, but Robin, I only mean to have one pupil in my school, and I don't think he'll want to fight me."

"Only one; that will be a funny school. Why there was all the boys about went to ours," and Robin began to reckon their names on his fingers, beginning with Bob and Jonas.

"I want you to be my pupil, Robin, and we'll have school here every evening."

"Oh, how jolly," cried Robin, jumping up from the floor. "But what will you learn me? will it be out of my book?" and Robin pulled his treasured Testament from his pocket.

"I'll try," said Nicholas. "We can read

it together, anyhow, and you might begin to write, perhaps."

"Oh! and then if I knew where father was, I could write him a letter all my own self. I am so glad I said I would stay!" cried Robin. "I shall like your school, Nicholas. Shall we begin to-night?"

"Why, you silly fellow, it is ten o'clock, and time you were asleep," answered Nicholas, laughing. "Off with you, and we'll see what we can do to-morrow."





CHAPTER VII.

ROBIN'S NEIGHBOR.

NICHOLAS had chosen for their first lesson part of the twenty-second chapter of St. Matthew. Robin had learned a good deal from the peddler, and could manage the short words, while he spelt his way triumphantly through all the long ones; but he thought nothing of the meaning of what he was reading till he came to the word "commandment" in the thirty-sixth verse. The sound was familiar, and reminded him of the treasured leaf from which he took his first lessons; and when he had read on a little further he said, looking

up in Nicholas's face, "Those two commandments are not on my paper."

"No," said Nicholas, "but they are what you may call the meaning of all the others. If you were to keep these two, you would never break any of those you have on your paper, Robin."

The boy looked puzzled, and was going on with his reading, but Nicholas stopped him by saying, "If you loved God, you could not have any other god, could you? nor take His holy name in vain? and you could not break His Sabbath, which He told us to keep. And if you loved all the people about you as well as you loved yourself, you could never hurt them or steal from them, or say what was not true about them, or want to have their things for yourself."

"No," said Robin, thoughtfully. "And I don't see how any one can help loving God, when they know how He loves us, and how good He is; but there are some folks I don't love. I hate Mr. Pierson, I do, and Nathan Roberts's missus, so there;" and Robin stamped with his foot.

"God loves them," said Nicholas, in a low tone.

"I suppose He does," replied Robin, doubtfully, "but I can't."

"I think, Robin, if we could love God very much, we should love everybody that He cares for."

"I can't love folks I don't know," said Robin, half angrily. "God loves everybody in the world, but we need only love the folks that are good to us."

"Robin," said Nicholas, "I love you so much, that I love your father for your sake, though I have never seen him, just because you set so much by him; so I'm sure we ought to be able to love people because God cares for them."

The tears came into Robin's eyes as he slid his hand into the thin long fingers which were turning the leaves of the Bible. "You are a deal better than me, Nicholas," he said, "but I will try. I won't hate Mr. Pierson if I can help it anyhow."

"We must ask God to help us to love

Him more : that must be the best way of learning to love our neighbor. Oh, Robin, sometimes when I think about how He loves us, it seems so beautiful and wonderful, that I forget everything else. It doesn't seem to matter that I am a poor, ignorant, sickly lad, and that I can't do anything great, nor know much ; nothing seems to matter, for I am sure it is all right, and just as it should be, because God loves me."

"There's the bell!" cried Robin, as he heard the first sound from the steeple of a neighboring church, whose organ Nicholas played on two evenings in the week. "You must be going, Nicholas, but I can't come with you. Captain said as Grip and I must keep on board to-night."

It very often happened, however, that the captain managed to spare Robin to walk with Nicholas to church, and there the boy would perch himself in one of the front seats, feeling as if he had a sort of property in the music, and as if the singing were somehow a compliment to his friend. The

two boys used greatly to enjoy the walk home together, through the lights and shadows of the streets, where they would talk together of those deeper thoughts which do not come so readily to the lips of boys in the midst of the day's light and work. The longing to do right was growing strong in Robin's heart, for its life and its motive was the love of God who had so loved him. The Saviour of whom Nicholas spoke seemed to him a Friend near at hand, to whom he could speak out of the depths of his heart ; who knew all his faults and weaknesses, and yet loved and pitied him day by day.

As the boys read together, evening after evening, of His life on earth, of His divine strength, and tenderness, and patience, of His patient suffering, of His compassion for all others who suffered ; so did the image of his Saviour grow more and more distinct in Robin's mind, so that he himself began to strive, feebly and mistakenly often, but still to strive to follow and be like Him.

March was come, and one evening about

nine o'clock the two friends were coming home, Nicholas walking slowly along, his hand upon Robin's shoulder. They were close beside the river, when, quite suddenly, Nicholas stopped, and bent down as if to look at something dark, which Robin could dimly see lying before them, almost within reach of the wash of the water.

"What is it?" asked Robin; but Nicholas did not seem to hear. He was kneeling now, and with both hands turning the dark bundle towards the distant feeble lamp-light. Presently he said, in a low whisper, which Robin could only just hear, "He *is* alive. Run, Robin; run quick, and bring my father. We shall save him yet."

Robin ran, hardly knowing why, nor what he should say to the captain, whom he found smoking his pipe on deck, but his master seemed not at all surprised at his hurried, breathless words; and muttering something about their never giving him any peace, knocked the ashes from his pipe into the river, and putting it into his pocket, walked

without any appearance of hurry, but really so fast that Robin could hardly keep up with him, towards the spot to which the boy had pointed.

Nicholas was still stooping over the dark bundle, which the captain, bending down lifted in his arms, and carried towards the nearest lamp. He gave a low long whistle, but whether of surprise or dismay Robin could not tell, and began to stride hastily homeward. Robin, as he followed, half running, the captain's long steps, began to understand better what had happened. Nicholas had found some one lying as he himself had once lain in the road, when the peddler took pity on him. Perhaps he was half-drowned or starving, and the captain was taking him home to try to save him. Robin's thoughts flew at once to his father. 'His world was so small, that he could not understand how unlikely it was that his father should be close by; nothing seemed more probable to the boy, whose thoughts day and night were with the only one to whom he seemed to belong.

The captain laid his burden on the cabin table, and Robin, with a smothered cry of "father," ran at once to his side, but his master pulled him back.

"'Father,' indeed!" said he, "'tis but a poor boy; stand back and give him air; or stay, you can rub his feet and hands, whlie I get some broth ready; he'll come to, he'll do. I've seen a many such."

And by the time Nicholas' slower feet had crossed to the boat, the lad had already half unclosed his lips to receive the warm broth, which the captain was giving him with all the tenderness and care of a woman. The boy, who wore a torn and patched sailor's dress, had been a cabin-boy on board a small merchant vessel, from which he had been discharged ill a few days ago. The little money which he had, had all been lost, or taken from him at a sailors' boarding house, to which he had gone for shelter; and being friendless and homeless, and too ill to care much what became of him, he had crawled along the river side, with some thought of finding shelter for the night in

one of the barges ; but he was too weak, and had fallen down, as he thought, to die, when Nicholas touched him as he passed, and stopped to look. By the time the boy had revived enough to tell them his story, which the captain heard, standing with his back to them, and drubbing with his fingers all the time on the little window, it was long past ten o'clock, and Robin felt tired and unhappy. He would not go to his hammock, and yet it made him feel miserable to see Nicholas bending over the sick boy, and soothing him with gentle words.

Robin had not known before how much he loved Nicholas, and now he began to tell himself that his friend did not really care for him, that he spoke just as kindly to this strange boy. "I dare say, he would like me to go, and let this other boy stay in my place," thought Robin; "and I will go too, and if I'm starved, it won't matter; nobody cares for me in all the world." He was so absorbed in these thoughts, that he did not hear the whispered talk between the cap-

tain and his son, as to where the sick boy had best be put for the night, until Nicholas turned around, and saying aloud, "Yes, father, I think that will be best," came up to Robin, and said in a low voice, "Robin, you won't mind sleeping on the cabin floor to-night, and letting the poor boy have your hammock, will you? 'Twill be softer for him, poor fellow!"

Robin did not answer, only turned a little away with an angry frown on his face, for he did not like to meet the sorrowful gaze, which he felt rather than saw, in the blue eyes which were fixed on him.

"Father," said Nicholas, going quietly to his side, "perhaps, after all, the boy had better be in the cabin. He will be nearer at hand in case he wants anything in the night, and he can have my old rug for a bed; it will be a deal softer than the paving-stones that he has slept on of late, anyway."

"Please yourself," said the captain. "I take no concern about the matter. You found him, didn't you? Let him sleep on deck, for aught I care."

"We'll do better for him than that," said Nicholas, smiling, as, without asking any help from Robin, he began to arrange the bed, on which the captain placed the sick boy.

Robin was tired enough as he lay down in his hammock that night, but he could not sleep. He was restless and miserable because he had admitted into his heart angry and jealous thoughts ; and instead of asking God to take them away, and trying to fill his mind with loving and grateful remembrances, kept repeating to himself all the kind words which he had heard Nicholas say to the poor lad, and making himself believe that his friend no longer cared for him. The angry, bitter thoughts that tempted him to sin, were speaking loud in his heart ; but there was another voice, still and small, which yet made itself heard over all, a voice which repeated to him words that he had read in God's own book, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." For a long time Robin would not listen. Over and over

again he settled himself in his hammock and drew his rug over his face, determined to sleep and forget it all, but he could not. By-and-by he began to think of the sick boy, who was perhaps trying in vain to sleep on the hard cabin floor. He remembered the nights when he had himself been so desolate and lonely, and began to feel ashamed of his selfishness and ingratitude.

God had been so kind to him, and yet, when asked to show kindness to another who was suffering, he was angry and turned away.

"I am very sorry ; I am a very bad boy, and I shouldn't think God would ever forgive me," he said to himself, " but I *will* ask Him ;" and crawling out of his bed, he knelt in the thick darkness of the little hold, and tried to pray for pardon.

But the words would not come. It seemed impossible to ask to be forgiven, while the poor boy was yet lying on the hard floor, his stiff limbs perhaps aching more and more every minute. Yet Robin felt he could not

get into his hammock again; and creeping softly along, first to the deck, where he felt the keen wind, and then down the ladder, he entered the cabin, where a little light, from a craft moored close beside, shone through the tiny window. He could see the sick boy's eyes wide open, and hear a little feeble moan as he entered, and, feeling more than ever ashamed of himself, he crept to the side of the rug, "Why can't you sleep?" he whispered very softly, for fear of waking the captain and Nicholas, whose hammocks were slung not far off.

"I feel sore all over, and my bones ache like," answered the boy, hoarsely.

"Would you fancy a hammock? 'Twould be easier lying than this," went on Robin.

The boy's face brightened a little. "But I can't, they are both full," he answered, doubtfully.

"That's the captain and Nicholas. He wanted ever so bad to give up his, but captain put his foot down that he shouldn't, for he's but weakly and lame, you know. But

there's my hammock. I could get you there in a minute if you can walk. It's only up the ladder and down again : you can manage that if I help you, can't you ? ”

“ Yes,” said the boy, with pleasure at the idea of change and of the cold air ; “ but what will you do ? ”

“ I shall have a rare game, lying on the floor ; 'tis fun to me. I was used to it like at home. Here, keep you hold of my hand, and we'll be up in no time,” and Robin wrapped the rug round the trembling boy.

When he had seen his new companion warmly covered, and so comfortable he felt sure he should go to sleep at once, Robin returned to the cabin, but before he lay down he knelt once more. And now he could ask for pardon. He was more sorry and ashamed than before, but the sorrow was no longer hard and speechless. His kind words to the poor boy had softened his own heart, and the love which God had caused to take the place of his angry feelings, brought with it the assurance of forgiveness, through that

love of which all that we can feel is but the faintest reflection.

As he lay down, his eye fell for a moment on a heap in the corner of the cabin, the captain's clothes, thrown there in careless disorder, and Robin saw to his surprise, that close by them, on the floor, lay a shining coin, a gold sovereign, as he saw when he stooped to pick it up. He held it for a moment, thinking what he should do with it, and then laying it down on the corner of the little table, where the captain would see it in the morning, he rolled himself in the rug, and was soon fast asleep.





CHAPTER VIII.

THE RESCUE.

PERHAPS it was the hard bed which caused Robin to wake earlier than usual; for as soon as the first gray light shone into the cabin he was up and on deck, about to begin his day's work, before either the captain or Nicholas had left their hammocks.

To his surprise, he found the sick boy wrapped in a rug, and leaning over the side of the lighter. He was so hot below, he said, and indeed he looked wearied and feverish. Robin did not know how bad it was to linger in the chill air, so he made a seat among some casks, and when Nicholas

came up the two were chatting busily together, as Robin hurried to and fro about his morning's work.

Nicholas gave a cry of surprise at seeing the boy seated there, and looked at Robin for explanation.

"He said it was so hot down below," said Robin; "and his arm hurt him" bad. Have you seen his arm, Nicholas?"

The right arm uncovered showed a deep wound near the shoulder, which had evidently been neglected, and was hot and festering.

"He did it aboard ship, he says," explained Robin. "One of the men was after him with a rope, and running round the deck, he fell on some big bit of iron."

"Father knows more of such things than I do," said Nicholas, going away to call his father, with an anxious look, which did not escape Robin's quick eyes. Presently the captain came slowly on deck. He too looked very grave, and he spoke to the sick boy in a tone which, though kind, seemed to show

either uneasiness or absence of mind. The boy winched and shivered as the captain touched the wound, and was in such evident pain, that Robin felt more than ever ashamed of his selfishness the night before. After some little talk between Nicholas and his father, the captain turned to Robin and told him to hurry breakfast, for that he meant to take the boy to a hospital as soon as possible. " 'Tis a bad wound, a bad wound," he muttered. "He'll need the best of care to pull him through, and 'tis not I will do anything against his having it, poor fellow. If we all had our deserts, some of us would be badly off."

Robin was too busy blowing the damp sticks into flame to think much of the captain's words, though he could not understand them. Presently the captain went away with the boy, dressed in an outgrown suit of Nicholas's; and when he returned, about noon, saying that the lad had been admitted, he brought with him also word that they must get up sail and be off, for he

had to unload a vessel two miles further down. All were now too busy to talk or even think much of what had been of so great interest the night before. Nicholas was going with them, and they were soon making their slow way down the river, after the few casks which still encumbered the deck had been safely stowed on shore.

Nicholas seemed to have forgotten how badly Robin had behaved the night before. He spoke to him in his usual pleasant tone, though Robin fancied that both he and his father were a little grave and absent, as though something had happened to make them sorry.

But he had not much time for such thoughts. They were soon alongside the great ship, receiving bale after bale of soft cotton goods, which, as fast as they were received, Nicholas and Robin helped to pile in some sort of order. It was almost dusk before they left, heavily laden, for the wharf at which their cargo was to be discharged, and Robin sat down among the bales to rest

and cool his face — hot, despite the chill breeze. A hand touched his shoulder, and looking up with a start, he saw the captain watching him, with almost a smile on his face. “You’ll make a sailor in time, boy,” he said; “you begin to have the cut of one. You’ve worked famously to-day.” They were the first words of praise which Robin had heard from his master, and they were very sweet to him.

Little by little the boy’s first fear of the stern, sharp-speaking captain had been changing into an earnest wish to win the approval of one whom it seemed so hard to please. Robin started up, his glowing face hotter than ever, and muttering something about Nicholas having done more than half, he began to collect some of the smaller things scattered about the deck, and then flew down into the cabin to put everything ship-shape there.

But when his work below was only half done, a sudden shout called him on deck, and before he could clearly understand the

meaning of the alarm, he and Nicholas were pulling at the ropes with desperate energy, the captain at the helm, shouting with a set face his hurried orders, while he kept his eye fixed on a large steamer, which was bearing down on them so quickly, that it seemed as if the two must meet before the course of either could be checked or altered.

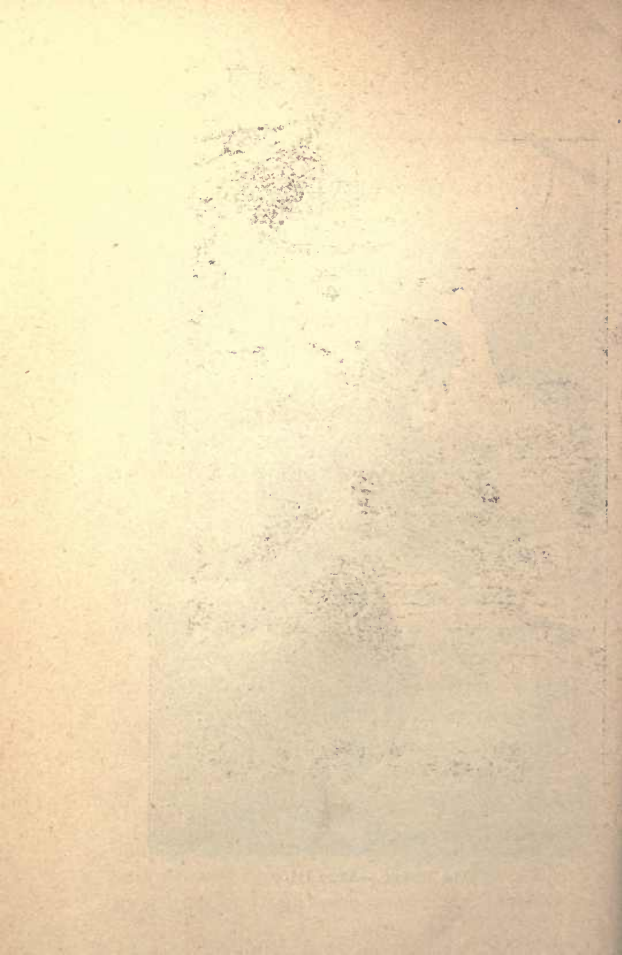
It was all over in three minutes, yet it seemed to Robin as if he had stood for an hour at that rope, seeing, though scarcely knowing that he saw, the crowded deck of the steamer and the excited gestures of the passengers, and hearing the shouts and cries of the sailors. It was coming now! The steamer would touch them, graze them at least! No; they were safe; there was nearly a foot between them. She had shot ahead, and all danger was over.

But what was that sudden cry? Robin, who had covered his eyes in terror as the steamer came nearer and nearer, unclasped his hands, and saw what made him forget everything, loose his hold on the rope, and

run forward. A little girl, who had been leaning over the side of the steamer, had, unnoticed as it seemed in the confusion, crept to the only unguarded place, where they had been preparing to lower a boat, and now, as she stood watching the lighter close behind them, she suddenly lost her balance and fell into the water. Robin saw the little blue cloak strike the water, saw the fair hair and white arms for one moment above the surface, and heard again the cry which had rung through his ears the moment before. He had been the best swimmer at home, and he never thought of hesitating now. He had kicked off his thick boots, and dived from the deck long before the boat could be lowered from the steamer, and was swimming with all his strength towards the spot where he had last seen the fair hair. As he plunged he saw, though he did not remember it till afterwards, a tall figure on the deck of the steamer, preparing as it seemed to leap over, and held back by force by others who were crowding around ;



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and the remembrance of this tall figure dwelt in his mind, as of some one he had known or seen long before. Now, however, he had but one thought—to save the little drowning child; and as once more he saw the blue cloak floating on the water, close beside him, he grasped it with all his might with his left hand, hoping to keep himself afloat with the other, till the boat should come. But help was not so near at hand as he had thought. The boat chains had become twisted, and every one was so hurried and confused that the captain of the steamer gave his orders in vain; while Robin, growing fainter and weaker, was almost ready to loose his hold of the clinging child.

But he would not. He could see nothing of what was going on around him, but as he seemed to sink deeper and deeper in the water, his mind grew very clear and wakeful. He saw all his past life as in a picture, the little cottage where he had spent his twelve years of ignorant childhood, his father's disappearance, his rambling life with

the peddler, the new thoughts which were beginning to fill his mind. He saw even his own most treasured hopes set before him, as if they might be really his—his father found, and become a good man; himself a scholar, rich, and looked up to by all the boys of the village; the old captain and Nicholas living somewhere near, so that he could see them every day, and Nicholas could play the organ in the old church, at what Robin still called “home.” He saw them, and felt as if all these might yet be his, if only he would loose his grasp of the child while there was yet time, but he could not. Something stronger even than the desire of life made him hold fast, as the child’s arms about him grew weak and strengthless, and in his heart he prayed, “O God, save us.”

It was but a very few minutes, though to Robin it seemed hours, and he did not hear the sudden cry of gladness and relief as the spectators saw a great black dog spring from the deck of the lighter, swim to

the spot where Robin was almost disappearing under the water, and, seizing him with his teeth, push him and the burden, which he still clasped, towards the boat from which he had come.

“Good Grip, brave dog!” said Nicholas, with a sob, as he and his father lifted the two senseless, and, as it seemed, lifeless forms to the deck. The boat was afloat by this time, and the little pale girl, with closed eyes and drenched hair and cloak, was soon carried by it to the steamer, while the captain and Nicholas bent over Robin, trying every means which they knew to restore the life that seemed almost gone.

When his consciousness returned at last, and he opened his eyes, he was in the cabin, lying on the rug on which he had slept the night before. Perhaps it was because of this that his first thoughts were of the sick boy, and that he attempted to rise, with some not very clear idea of going to the hammock to see how he had passed the night. But when he tried to rise he found

himself so weak that he sank back again, and closed his eyes ; not, however, before he had seen Nicholas bending over him, with a glad smile on his face.

Robin remembered it all now ; the whole scene came clearly before his mind, and specially recalled, with a kind of troubled interest, the figure of the tall gentleman whom he had seen struggling on the deck. Surely he had seen him before. But it harassed him to try and remember where ; and he was glad to look up again at Nicholas, intending to ask whether the little girl was safe. But he forgot his question as he saw the tears on his friend's face, tears not of sorrow but of loving gladness ; and he lifted one of his arms, and put it over Nicholas's shoulder as he knelt beside him.

"You're glad I'm not drowned?" said Robin, with a catching in his voice as he asked the question.

"I must have come after you," said Nicholas, only answering the question by a closer clasp of the brown hand which lay in his

own. "But I knew nothing would keep father back then, and he can't swim, Robin. I had to hold him fast, as it was, I can tell you; 'twas he thought of calling Grip."

The dog, as if he heard his name, came pattering down the cabin stairs, and pushing open the door with his nose, put his great black paws on Robin's breast, and licked his face affectionately, a liberty which his master for once allowed.

"I didn't know any one would care," said Robin, presently.

"Why, Robin," said Nicholas, "you're my friend. I was so lonesome before you came; I don't know what I should do to lose you."

"Then I'll be good; I'll learn fast," said Robin, sitting up, as he felt his strength returning. "I shall be quite happy if you love me, you and your father," and he spoke the last words doubtfully.

"Father is ever so proud and pleased with you," said Nicholas. "He says you've the making of a man in you, but he's finely

put out because we've heard nothing from the steamer; but I say 'tis barely four hours ago, and they'll have been busy with the little lass."

"Is she alive?" asked Robin, earnestly.

"She had not come to when they took her away, but that was just as Grip pulled you both out. Oh, she'd do, she'd be sure to do, never fear. We shall hear something of the steamer to-morrow; but she's gone on, and we are at the wharf now; don't you hear father overhead with the goods? He's got two men to help him, and sent me down to you; we are off for another load soon."

Robin lay still in happy content, listening to the sound of feet and voices overhead, and holding his friend's hand in his own. Presently he said, "I'm going to sleep, Nicholas, and I can't get up to say my prayers, and I can't think of the words. Could you say a prayer, and I'll say it after you? and don't forget the little girl, Nicholas."

And so Robin sank to sleep, while his

friend watched him in the dusk of the quiet cabin. He moved a little now and then, and Nicholas heard him murmur more than once, in a tone of gladness and surprise, "Then you are glad I'm not drowned?"





CHAPTER IX.

TEMPTATION.

ROBIN," said Nicholas, coming into the cabin the next morning, just as the boy was waking from a long sound sleep; "here's the gentleman come, and asking after you."

"Gentleman!" said Robin, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. "I don't know who you mean."

"It was his little girl," replied Nicholas, lucidly.

"Oh yes. Is the little girl come too?" And Robin, without waiting for an answer, rolled himself off the chairs which had

served him for a bed, and began to dress, though he felt curiously weak and giddy.

“ ’Tis only the gentleman,” answered Nicholas, talking in the intervals of helping Robin with his hurried toilet ; “ but he says the little girl is doing finely. He is a tall, good-looking gentleman enough, and he seems main set on seeing you ; but he has a way with him I don’t like — but there, you’ll see him for yourself soon enough. Stay a bit, Robin ; brush your hair, boy ; you’ll do now ; tumble on deck as fast as ever you like.”

When Robin, tumbling on deck as Nicholas had advised, found himself in the presence of a tall, dignified, white-haired gentleman — whose habit of command showed itself even in his words of gratitude to the boy who had saved his child’s life — a strange, distressed feeling of shyness came over him.

“ And now, my boy, what can I do for you ?” said the gentleman, after he had thanked him warmly. “ I’m a rich man,

and you have every claim on me. I should like to push you a step on in the world. Come, tell me what you would wish."

Robin's attitude, as he stood silent, his eyes fixed on the deck, while with his fingers he pulled nervously at the front lock of his brown hair, amused the strange gentleman. But he was also rather surprised: this was not the usual manner of a London-bred lad, it was the same kind of frightened awkwardness he was accustomed to see in the boys about his place in the country, when by chance he asked a question of one of them.

Meanwhile many troubled thoughts and remembrances were passing through Robin's mind, for now that he had seen the gentleman near, and heard him speak, he knew at once why it was that his figure had seemed familiar to him when he saw him on the deck of the steamer.

"Come, speak up, my boy," went on his companion, in an amused tone of encouragement. "Don't be afraid of asking too much."

“If you please, sir,” answered Robin, still without looking up, “I don’t want anything. I didn’t save miss — I mean the little girl — that is, the young lady — for that; but, if you didn’t think it too great a liberty, I should like to send her my duty, and hoping she finds herself finely this morning.”

“You shall come and see her — not to-day though, but when she is a little stronger. My wife wants to thank you too. Let me see — this is Thursday — suppose we say Monday. Can you let this little fellow come to me on Monday, about twelve?” and the gentleman turned to the captain, who was standing not far off, and who gave no answer save a rather surly nod.

“Very well; this is my address for the present; we are but just returned from abroad, and shall stay at the Cavendish till my little girl has quite recovered;” and the gentleman, scribbling the name of his hotel on his card, handed it to the captain, saying, as he did so, “The boy will have

time to think of what I have said, and you will be able to advise him. I consider myself under the greatest obligation to every one of you, and you will find that I shall be ready to show it."

Another surly nod, and something like a little growl from the captain, and the gentleman was gone.

"Up with sails now, boys, in quick time, there's a brisk breeze, and we must be off. A fine gentleman like that doesn't think that time is money to such as us."

"I don't want nothing of the gentleman," said Robin suddenly that evening, when the three were in the cabin, having returned to their old mooring-place by the wharf. "He's squire. I know *him* well enough, though he don't take no heed to me. He turned father off; and father," and Robin lowered his voice, "he burnt his ricks."

The captain gave a low whistle. "So that's the time of day, is it? I thought you was tongue-tied this morning. You must tell the Squire on Monday, Robin: maybe he might forgive your father."

“Oh, do you think he would?” and Robin clasped his hands with eager hope. “But he’s a hard gentleman, is Squire.”

“Now, boy,” said the captain, sitting down and laying his hand on Robin’s shoulder as he stood by his side, “’tisn’t often I trouble folks with my advice, but I’ve a bit to give you now. Be open and above-board with the gentleman; no skulking, mind ye. Say right out whose son you are, and maybe you’ll have a chance to get in a word for your father; and if so, don’t you be afraid of asking. ’Tis your duty. But if not, and seeing he’s a hard man, as you say, he’ll likely not hearken to you. You be guided by me, and keep your hand shut if he wants to put gold in it. Money’s a good thing boy, but ’tis a better to be able to do a brave thing for the love of God, and for its own sake, and never want to be paid.”

Robin’s eyes lighted up, and he shut his brown fist very fast, but he said not a word.

“I’ll say a word for you, Robin, if that will help with the Squire,” went on the

captain, kindly. "You tell him I'll go bai for it you are an honest good lad, and there's plenty of folks about the waterside will tell him Captain Jacobs don't give his good word for nought."

Robin could only mutter a "Thank you kindly, captain," which seemed almost to choke him. His heart was very full, and before he climbed into his hammock that night he thanked God, who had given to him — an orphan and an outcast, so desolate but a few months ago — kind friends and a safe home, where he was being taught of the love of his Father in heaven.

Saturday night had come, and Robin with a happy heart was busy as usual, putting everything in the lighter into perfect order, that all might look fresh and clean on Sunday morning, of which he was now beginning to think as of the brightest day in the week.

He was singing to himself, as he busied himself in arranging the cabin, one of the hymns which Nicholas had taught him ; but

he sang so softly that he could plainly hear the voices of the captain and his son talking on deck, where the old man was enjoying his pipe, in the mildness of the April evening.

“Father,” said Nicholas, “we musn’t forget that poor boy in the hospital: he looked in a bad way.”

“I’ve not forgot him,” said the captain, gruffly. Then in a lower tone, “I’d best tell thee about it, Nicholas, for I’m main puzzled what to do: that boy is a thief, I tell you.”

“Oh, father, I do hope not: he didn’t seem like a bad boy.”

“I’m loath to think it,” replied the old man, sadly; “but there was a sovereign in my pocket that night that he slept in the cabin, and come morning it was gone. I was an old fool and worse to leave it there, and partly for that, and partly that, be the boy what he might, he was ill and in need, I held my tongue and took him to hospital, whether to go and see him Wednesday —

that's visiting day — and say nought about it, I don't know."

Robin could not listen any longer. All the light went out of his face and the gladness from his heart. The boy had not taken the sovereign, of that he felt sure, for had he not seen it when he came into the cabin? It had not been there when he came down from his work on deck, but Robin had never doubted but that the captain had taken it from the table, and put it again in his pocket and now he knew that it had not been found. The temptation to be silent about what he had seen was very strong. The boy was not there to wake Robin's better feelings by the sight of his pale face, and his own interest pleaded very strongly. He must lose, he thought, if he spoke, not only Nicholas's love and the captain's newly-given confidence, but also his good word with the Squire, and thus the chance of winning forgiveness for his father. He might even be turned away from his home on the lighter, for of course every one would believe that

he was a thief, if he admitted that he had slept in the cabin, and had seen the sovereign.

At any rate he would not speak yet, he thought. It was doing no harm to be silent, for the boy did not know that he was suspected, and the captain could not go to the hospital before Wednesday ; it would be all in good time by-and-by. But the Sunday that was to have been such a happy, peaceful day, was one of the most miserable that Robin had ever known. He felt guilty and ashamed, shrinking away from the kind words and looks which he felt he did not deserve ; and though he knew that he was entirely innocent of even wishing to take the sovereign, yet the fact that he was concealing the truth made him feel almost as guilty as if he had stolen it.

“ So you have to go and see your fine friends to-day, boy,” said the captain the next morning, with a half-dissatisfied air ; “ and I can’t say you look best pleased with the prospect. You must show a brighter

face than that. What maggot have you got in your head now? The Squire won't hurt you, and as for the little girl, she'll be pleased enough to see you, I'll go bail."

"I don't like grand folks," answered Robin, hanging his head.

"Nonsense, boy," said the captain, striking his hand on the table, "I have no patience with that sort of talk. Know your betters, say I; and when a man is older, and stronger, and better, and higher-learnt than you, and when God puts him above you, then honor him and do him reverence, and show your own self-respect in doing so; but no talk about 'grand folk,' as if you were thinking of the fine cloth in his coat or the horses in his carriage."

"But," said Robin, rather alarmed at the captain's vehemence, "you called them 'fine folk' yourself but a minute ago."

"What I may do and what you may do, is two things," answered the old man, laying down this incontrovertible position slowly; "and you'll never make a good sailor till

you learn to take your captain's orders as he gives them ; and now I must be off. We shall be alongside till eleven or nigh about, and you must take the boat when you come back, and make for us at the old place. I've a heavy bit of work on to-day, so don't loiter."

At the appointed time Robin presented himself timidly at the great doors of the hotel, showing the Squire's card to one of the waiters, who handed him on to another, by whom he was taken up a flight of broad carpeted stairs into a large handsomely furnished room, in which he was left standing, moving his feet and arms uneasily, as he saw himself, his brown face and curly hair, and his best suit of rough blue cloth, reflected in three or four tall mirrors, which seemed to make the room twice as large as its real size.

But at the thought of his father, and of the errand on which he had come, his timidity left him. He forgot himself, as he repeated over and over the words in which he

had intended to make his request to the Squire.

Presently an inner door opened, and a young graceful-looking lady, whom Robin had never seen, came towards him, and, with a pleasant smile, bid him follow her into a small sitting-room; where on a couch, lay the little golden-haired girl whom Robin had saved, the Miss Florence whom he had seen so often in old days, as she rode through the village on her rough brown pony, her long curls blowing behind her in the wind.

She half raised herself, smiling, and held out her little hand as Robin came near; while the lady, who was, he supposed, the Squire's new wife whom he married just before he went abroad, put her hand on his shoulder, and, stooping down, kissed him. Robin could not remember that any one had ever kissed him before, except old Sally, when he was very small, and once little Lettice, when he had saved the strawberries for her sick brother, and the tears gathered in his eyes as he looked at the lady's sweet

face. She sat down and drew him towards her, keeping her hand on his arm. "So you are the boy who saved my dear little girl for me," she said at last. "I must thank you for her, for I do not think she can speak for herself."

"Miss Florence is kindly welcome, ma'am, and I hope she finds herself hearty," said Robin, looking towards the little girl as he spoke.

"How do you know my name?" she asked, opening her eyes in surprise.

"If you please, ma'am," said Robin, turning to the lady—and, now that the decisive moment had come, speaking in a simple, straightforward manner—"I know the Squire and Miss Florence quite well. My father lived on the Squire's place as long as ever I can remember."

"Indeed," replied the lady, evidently much surprised; "but that will only give you an added claim on us. The Squire is very anxious to do something for you, to show you the gratitude which every one of

us must always feel to you; and he wishes us to learn from you what you would like best. Whatever it is, I am sure he will try to do it; tell us, what would please you most?"

"If Squire would forgive father," said Robin, trying to speak clearly, but with a little sob of repressed feeling. "I'm Robin Wallack, and father set light to Squire's ricks, and he's gone away, and no one knows where he is; but if Squire would forgive him, we might be happy again. Oh! do ask him for me: if you and Miss Florence ask him, likely he'll say Yes;" and Robin clasped his hands in eager entreaty.

A quick step, and the Squire himself, tall and cold and gray, came through the open door, and stood beside the group. "No need to speak," he said to his wife, as she turned towards him. "I have heard what the boy says, and now let him listen to my answer. Listen to me, young Wallack; you had my promise to give you whatever you asked, and I shall keep my promise, though



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you have asked a harder thing than you know."

"Thank you, Squire," began Robin, eagerly, but the Squire's uplifted hand silenced his eager speech.

"Hear what I say before you answer. If I forgive this man, what good will it do you? You do not know where he is, you say; he has very likely left the country. If you could find him he would soon be in fresh trouble, and drag you down with him; he has left you — do you leave him. Forget that you had a father," went on the Squire, in his cold hard tone, "and I will try and forget it too, and only look on you as the preserver of my child, and will have you taught a good trade; or, if you like a sea-going life, I will get you a good berth and help you on: or I will put you to school, and give you the education by which you may rise in the world. But understand, young Wallack, if you find your father, and live with him, I do nothing more for you than what you have asked; that is,

to drop all proceedings against him, and give him the chance of setting fire to some one's else ricks elsewhere."

For one moment Robin hesitated; the promise of the means of getting a good education was a great and real temptation; but it was only for a moment, and almost as the Squire ended came Robin's ready answer.

"I can't give up father," he said. "Oh, ma'am, if I could only find him I could tell him what they've learnt me out of the Book, for he didn't know anything about it; and I think he wouldn't have done it, Squire, if he had; and maybe he would be a good man, and that would be best of all."

"And how do you mean to set to work to find your father?" said the lady, gently, for the Squire had turned away as if in anger.

"Captain said as it could be put in the papers that if he would come back he wouldn't be put in prison," said Robin, vaguely. "And there's a man as goes

about the country—a packman, you know—has promised to look out for him,” he went on, more hopefully, this seeming to him a much better chance than the mysterious papers.

“I shall make it my business to see the captain, young Wallack,” said the Squire, turning from the window, “and if he gives you a good character for steadiness and honesty, then, for your sake, and for what you have done for my child, I will forgive your father. You can try any means in your power to find him, and if he’s not heard of, we’ll say in six months, I will give you the chance once more of doing better for yourself in any of the ways I have named. Come, is it a bargain? You are a foolish fellow, but I believe you mean to be a good boy.”

Robin could hardly believe it when the stern-looking Squire, of whom he had stood in awe all his life, patted him kindly on the shoulder, while the lady bade him good-bye with one of her gentle smiles: and little

Miss Florence, beckoning him to the side of the sofa, put her soft little arms round his neck and whispered to him, "Oh, I do hope you will find your father. I shall ask God in my prayers every night to send him to you."

"Tell the captain I shall come to him for a character," said the Squire, as Robin turned at the door to make his best bow.





CHAPTER X.

A WAY TO ESCAPE.

HHE Squire's last words were sounding in Robin's ears through all the noises of the busy London streets. He heard them as, trusted for the first time alone with the boat, he pulled slowly and timidly down to the place where the lighter was anchored, by the side of the larger vessel whose cargo she was receiving. As he ran hither and thither about his work, obeying the captain's quick, sharp orders, his mind was still arguing with itself as to whether he should or should not tell that he had seen the sovereign; whether he should

run the risk that the captain might believe him a thief, and refuse to give the good character to the Squire on which hung the chance of his father's safety.

"I wouldn't tell a lie, not for anything," said Robin, half aloud; "but I don't see why I need to speak at all."

Yet even as he said this he was not satisfied, and went on arguing with himself; "If it was anything plain, like taking Squire's apples when Jonas asked me, I'd never even give it a thought; but there's nothing about this in the commandments, I reckon;" and half unconsciously he began to repeat to himself the well-known words.

Before he had quite reached the end he suddenly stopped. What were the words he was saying to himself so carelessly? "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." He knew what they meant, for Nicholas had explained them to him long ago.

"That's just what I say," he muttered, trying hard to put away the real teaching

from him; "that only means you shouldn't say what isn't true about any one, and I don't mean to. It doesn't say a word about getting yourself suspected of what you never did." But there were other words repeating themselves in his ears—words by which Nicholas had taught him to understand the true inner meaning of the commandment, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself."

"I must do it," he said at last, aloud: "I must tell the truth, and take the chance of what will happen. Day after to-morrow is Wednesday, and if captain keeps away from the boy, or goes, thinking him a thief, it will be my fault, and I couldn't stand that. For certain sure if I loved that boy—and he's one of my neighbors, I take it—as I love myself, I shouldn't let him be called a thief, when a word from me might clear him."

"Well, boy, what did the gentleman say about your father?" asked the captain at last, as, wiping his hot forehead with his

sleeve, he sat down on the edge of a bale of goods, to drink a cup of hot tea which Nicholas had prepared.

“He’ll look over it, he says,” answered Robin, and his heart beat fast as he spoke, “if you’ll give me a good word.”

“I’ll give you that,” said the captain, heartily, striking Robin on the shoulder with one of his rough horny hands. “You are a steady, honest, truth-speaking lad. I’ll go bail.”

“I want to be,” answered Robin, and his lip trembled. “But I didn’t tell you before. I know it wasn’t that boy in the hospital that took the sovereign, for he slept best part of the night in my hammock, and I had the rug: and before I went off to sleep I saw the sovereign on the floor, shining, and I picked it up and put it on the table, so as you might find it, come morning; and I took no more thought the boy had taken it, and I knew he hadn’t been in the cabin since I put it safe on the table;” and Robin paused, his voice shaking with the effort he had made.

He did not look up, so he could not see the smile on the old man's face; he only heard his stern voice in which he said, "And why did not you tell me this before?"

"I was afraid you would think I had took it," stammered Robin; "and oh, indeed, indeed captain, I never so much as give it a thought to touch it."

"Look here, Robin," said the old man, and his voice was not stern now, "do you see this?" and he took from his waistcoat pocket a gold sovereign, which he held up between his finger and thumb. "Here is the sovereign, safe enough, as you would have known if you had spoken the truth at once."

"I do so wish I had; I've been so miserable," said Robin. "But who had it, captain, all the time?"

"It was Saturday night, when you were snug in your hammock, I said to Nicholas, 'Before I set that unfortunate lad down for a thief, I'll at least do like the woman in the parable: I'll light a candle and sweep the

house.' No sooner said than done. I swept and I looked, this way and that, here and there; and at last sure enough I saw the money, just the bit of gold edge sticking out of a crack in the floor, and says I, 'As sure as my name is "Captain Jacobs," I'll do something for that poor boy, that's no more a thief than I am.'"

Robin's heart felt so light that he couldn't stay to drink his tea, nor eat more than a mouthful of the huge slice of bread and butter which had been cut for him. The captain said he did as much work as any two boys that evening, and could hardly be persuaded to stop, even when it was fully time for supper, and the evening prayer, which always closed the day.

Once, as he lay awake, the thought did cross his mind, "I need not have told, after all; no one would have been the worse!" But he knew it was not a true thought, he knew that he himself should have been the worse, that the effort to do right, because Christ had bidden him, had brought with it

comfort and peace, had drawn him closer to the Saviour who loved him.

There were thoughts and hopes in his heart that he had not known before, peace as of a child that is soothed by its mother's tenderness ; and as he lay listening to the wash of the water against the side of the boat, and the cries and voices and the splash of oars in the darkness, he heard, below them all, speaking as to his very heart, his Master's words : " If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."





CHAPTER XI.

CHRISTMAS AT THE OLD HALL.

MORE than five years had passed since little Robin Wallack had crept away, lonely and broken-hearted, from the fast-locked door of the cottage which had been his home ever since he could remember; but time, which had changed so many things, seemed almost to have forgotten to touch the woods and fields he so well remembered. There was a closer growth of golden lichens and star-moss on the brown thatch; and the rose by the door was thicker, and not so carefully trained perhaps as in the days when Robin's little

brown fingers had twisted every tendril, and touched each bud as it opened.

But even this would not be noticed now, for the roses had long since drifted away in the keen autumn wind; the stems were bare of leaves, and all their outline was traced in a delicate network of glittering frost over the time-stained cottage wall. The frost was marking, too, every delicate spray and cone of the fir trees, as they lifted their tall heads against a blue sky, glittering with almost the keenness of steel, silvering the thatch of the farm outside the wood where the firs had been, and making the gables and projecting eaves of the Hall look like parts of some fairy palace.

A red flag was flying in the keen wind, from a staff fixed on the roof of the Hall, for at last the Squire had come back to the old place; and the house was full of guests, merry parties riding through the woods, or skating on the round pond, and making the house ring with song and laughter. There will not have been such a gay Christmas in

the village since the Squire came of age. For Christmas is near now, and the holly-berries are bright and red amongst their shining leaves, especially on one tall tree, which grows so close to the library window that, as the wind waves the boughs to and fro, the stiff spiked leaves make a strange sharp sound, like a little cry, as they scratch against the glass.

Robin Wallack hears, though he scarcely notices, the sound, as he stands within the library this December morning, listening to the Squire, who, white-headed now, and just a little bent, is seated opposite to him in his large study chair.

“You are grown a fine strong young fellow,” said the Squire, with something like a sigh, as he glances at his own shrunken limbs, and thinks perhaps for a moment of that son whose grave is in a foreign land, and who might, if he had lived, have been such a stalwart lad as the young man before him. At the sigh, Miss Florence, who is seated in a low chair by the fire, lifts her

blue eyes and looks tenderly at her father ; and Robin sees again for the first time, after nearly five years, the face of the little girl whom he had saved. He had always thought of her as he saw her in her little blue cloak, sinking in the water, or lying pale and smiling on the couch in her mother's room ; and he had remembered through all these years the words in which she had promised to ask God that his father might be restored to him.

Robin felt sure she had not forgotten her promise, though it seemed as if the prayer had been unheard ; and as he looked at her, and thought how often her words had comforted and cheered him, he almost forgot the present, and started, as if with surprise, when the Squire, rousing himself from his sad thoughts, spoke again.

“ It is time we should think now of what use we should make of your education,” he said. “ I am quite satisfied with what I hear and see of your diligence and progress, and I don't doubt that you'll be able to

make your way in the world. You are now — let me see, what is your age ? ”

“Seventeen this month,” answered Robin, drawing himself to his full height, and speaking in a clear, manly voice ; “and indeed, sir, ’tis the greatest favor you could do me, to add to all your great kindness your advice as to my future life. I ought to be working for myself now. I can never repay your goodness, but I long to be able to show that it has not been quite thrown away.”

The Squire smiled at the boyish speech and the boyish action with which Robin lifted his strong young arm, as if longing to cut his way through every kind of obstacle ; but he answered kindly, “My advice must depend partly on your own inclinations. You have given up the idea of a sea-going life, I know. Tell me what it is you have in your mind.”

“Well, Squire,” said Robin, falling back to the old form of address, and hesitating a little, “you see I’ve more than myself to think for ; there’s Nicholas.”

"Nicholas," repeated the Squire, in a tone of perplexity. "I never knew you had a brother; I don't understand."

"He's not my brother exactly, though he's like one; he's the old captain's son that took care of me, you know; and captain is dead, and Nicholas and I we kind of hold together," said Robin, stammering and confused, and falling back into his old country speech.

"And you don't want to be parted from your friend? What is his trade — a lighter-man, like his father?"

"No, sir; he's not strong enough for that. He's a bit lame, is Nicholas, and weakly, and can't do any regular work. He has his father's savings, but that's not much; and he copies writings, and teaches the boys about. But he don't get much for that, and when he's sick and laid up, as he is at times, he would be likely to miss me, sir, being used to me so long."

"Well, well," said the Squire, shaking his head a little impatiently, "you have

some plan in your head, I see. Speak out, and let me know what you do wish."

"If I could be a schoolmaster," said Robin, bringing it out with a great effort, and turning very red. "I know enough to pass their examinations, I think; and though I'm only seventeen, I look a deal older; and Nicholas having the boys about him so much, I'm used to them, and bound to get along with them, and get them on; and then"—and he hurried out the words, as if fearing disappointment before he had shown all the advantages of his plan—"we could find some little place where he and I could live together, and Nicholas would get them on finely with their music."

"I cannot say this was what I expected. I thought you would be more ambitious. You are choosing a path that leads nowhere. Have you thought of it well?"

"It seems most like my duty, of anything I can think of," answered Robin, simply; "and if so, sir, the path will lead right, won't it?"

“Then it’s not the teaching itself you care about, eh?” and the Squire looked keenly into Robin’s open face.

“I can’t say it is, sir,” replied Robin, smiling. “But what else could I do, sir, and keep Nicholas with me?”

A smile of intelligence passed between Miss Florence and her father, as he said, “Come, now, I’ve heard your plan, and it’s time you should hear mine. What do you say to living in your old cottage (it’s empty just now), and spending your days up here, writing for me, and doing many things that I find myself too feeble to undertake now? The property is large, and requires much management; and now that I have parted with Mr. Pierson, I intend, for a time at least, to be my own bailiff; but I need a young active fellow like you to go about for me, and take some of the routine part off my hands. Your friend could live with you, and though I don’t promise you high pay at first, yet living is cheap in the country, and you’ll not find it hard to manage.”

"Oh, papa," broke in Miss Florence's eager voice, "it is just right! We want some one to play the harmonium, and help with the choir, so much. Nicholas will be the very person."

"I leave all that to you, pussy," said the father, smiling. "Now, Wallack, what do you think of my plan? Answer carefully, and bear this in mind—it leads somewhere. You will be learning, and fitting yourself for some post of trust in the future."

Robin had listened respectfully, the color mounting in his cheeks with surprise and pleasure, and now, in simple words, trembling with the feeling he could not otherwise express, he at once, and thankfully, accepted the Squire's kind and generous offer.

"You will like to live in your old cottage again, Robin?" said Miss Florence, presently.

"Indeed I shall, Miss Florence. 'Tis most like home to me of any place in the world, and"—his voice sinking almost to a

whisper — “father is more likely to come there than anywhere.”

He hardly knew that he spoke aloud, but the Squire had caught the words, and looked stern and displeased.

“I hoped that boyish folly was forgotten Wallack,” he said. “If your father is not dead, he has deserted you so long that he has lost all claim upon you as his son. Remember this — the offer which I have just made to you is made on the distinct understanding that you have no communication with your father.”

“’Tis better than five years since I heard a word about him,” replied Robin, sadly.

“But if you should do so, you must remember you will have to choose between what you mistakenly call your duty to him and your post here with me. I could not have your father living in my cottage, and with one trusted and employed by me. You will remember that.”

“I shall not forget, sir,” replied Robin, firmly, but his hopeful gladness was gone ;

and he was relieved when a message called the Squire away, and he could make his bow to Miss Florence, whose face had grown grave and sad as she listened to her father's words. He was just turning to go away, when she called him back, and said, with some little hesitation, "Don't give up praying for your father. Of course my father knows best what it is right for him to do; but to win your father back, to see him a good man, would be worth more than to succeed, to grow rich, or even to be looked up to and thought well of. Would it not?"

Miss Florence's words had brought back peace and calm to Robin's troubled thoughts, and as he made his way by the familiar field paths to the pine wood and the old cottage, all his doubts and uncertainty seemed to have left him. Yes, it should still be his most earnest prayer, his first aim, that his father might be restored.

His thoughts travelled back through the years, he recalled the months of anxious waiting when every effort had been made,

but made in vain, to learn whither his father had fled ; and the hope and fear with which he had looked into the face of any stranger loitering near the barge, and who might be perhaps the one for whose coming he so earnestly longed. The hope had been laid aside, but never forgotten, during the months and years of training and learning which had followed ; and now, with his future before him, his boyhood passing into the strength and hope of young manhood, it was still his most fervent prayer, his most earnest desire. And yet the boyish trust in his father, the child's undoubting love, had long since passed : it could not be otherwise.

Robin saw him now with clearer eyes, a man selfish, hard, violent, who had left in his mind no memory of tender words or kindly acts. He knew all this ; but he was still his father, the only being in the world to whom he was bound by ties of kinship. His father had lived without God, but if even now he could be taught of the Love which was waiting for him, and seeking

him, surely he would listen and turn. To tend him in feebleness and old age, to work for him, to love him, and thus to be able to lead him back to the Father whom he had forsaken, this indeed would be worth living for.

But this earnest hope and prayer need not prevent him from accepting the Squire's offered kindness. Nay, with his heart at rest as to what should be his choice did God at last send to him his father, he was more able to dwell on the pleasant prospect which seemed now opening before him.

He had reached the old cottage now, and began to think with delight how soon he might be showing to Nicholas the dear home about which he had so often talked to him : how he looked up at the little window among the bare rose-stalks, and wondered if old Grip would know his home again.

The days passed on, Robin had begun his new work, and was giving great satisfaction to the Squire, who found him quick, diligent, and intelligent, while Robin on his

part was delighted at the idea of being of service to his benefactor. He was settled now in his cottage, the Squire having advanced him money to buy a few plain articles of furniture, and on Christmas Eve Nicholas was to arrive. He would come by coach as far as the village, and Robin had promised to meet him there, and bring him home. He must set off through the wood now in a few minutes, and how happy he felt as he looked round the little room, and pictured the delight of seating Nicholas in the one cushioned chair which he had bought on purpose for his use, and of seeing his wonder and delight at the pleasant pine-wood fire which threw its changing, flashing light on the bunches of shining leaves and glowing berries with which Robin had dressed the walls. How pleasant and home-like it all looked. There, on a shelf which he had sawn and planed with his own hand, was his little store of books; on that small deal table could stand Nicholas's desk; and Nicholas was so clever too, he would think

of all manner of little things which they could do to improve the cottage. And when summer came, how he would delight to train the roses by the window, and tie up the bright carnations, which Robin already fancied that he saw growing before the door. In the evenings they would sit in the garden together and read, or wander sometimes up and down under the pine trees. How wonderful the forest would seem to Nicholas, who had seen so few trees in his life.

Robin had no clock in his cottage, and he could only judge by the gathering darkness that the time was come when he must set out to meet his friend. "Better wait a little," he said to himself, "than keep him waiting, poor fellow. He'll be half frozen with the cold, as it is; that old coat of his won't be much good on such a night as this."

With one more glance at the glowing fire, Robin was gone, shutting the door closely as he stood without in the dusk of the winter afternoon. It was past four, and nearly dark in the shade of the wood.

“How strange it will all seem to Nicholas,” thought Robin, as he walked on, whistling softly to himself, and making his way with quick, sure step, through the narrow dark paths, where his feet crushed at every step the crisp and frosted snow. “The shadows, and the white snow, and this dim light make it seem like a new place to me, who know it so well. The old stump looks almost like a man, but what an absurd idea to suppose any one would be sitting in the snow on a night like this;” and Robin laughed a little.

Grip, almost toothless now, and nearly blind, was walking slowly behind his master, his head hanging down; but he too seemed to share his master’s thought about the old stump, for suddenly he ran towards it, giving one or two sharp barks of excitement.

“Poor fellow, his sight and smell are both nearly gone,” said Robin. “Here, Grip, Grip, my boy, come back; we are going to see Nicholas. You’ll bark then to some purpose, won’t you?”

But Grip would not come. He was running round and round the old stump, his nose in the snow, wagging the remains of his tail with furious energy, but whining piteously from time to time, as if in doubt or distress.

One, two, three, four, five strokes rang slowly from the great clock over the stables at the Hall; the coach was in then, and Nicholas would be waiting. Robin began to run, calling again to Grip to follow him. This time the dog obeyed, but, to his master's surprise, he ran before him and planted himself in the way, looking up with appealing eyes, and a deprecating movement of his tail, as if to beg for help.

"Out of the way, good dog," cried Robin, but Grip would not move; and when his master tried to pass him, the dog seized his clothes, and held him as fast as he could with his toothless jaws.

In vain Robin tried, by coaxing and threatening, to make him loose his hold. Grip was drawing him with all his strength to-

wards the old stump, and his master could not free himself without more violence than he liked to use towards his old and faithful companion. It would be quicker, after all, to go with the dog, he thought; and Grip, as if understanding his thought, released his coat, and ran before him to where the dark form showed amidst the snow. Did it move a little as they came near? Robin almost thought so, and his heart beat quicker as he bent down and touched — not the hard rough, hard bark of a tree, but something that shrank away from the grasp of his hand.

What was it, that brought before him, as in a dream, that scene five years ago by the river side, when Nicholas and the old captain had found and saved the poor sailor boy? That made him sure at once that he was standing beside a living human form, even before he heard the low sob or sigh as of one suffering, yet too weak to speak which thrilled through him as he knelt on the snow. He had forgotten Nicholas now, he could think of nothing but the life which he might yet save.

"Please God, I am in time," he muttered, and in his heart the words were said as a prayer. He passed his hands over the chilled limbs, that seemed screened from the bitter cold only by a few scanty rags, and chafed the almost lifeless fingers.

"Can you move? Can you stand?" he asked, speaking in a loud, clear voice, the better to reach the dull sense of the poor sufferer; but there was no answer save a feeble groan.

"There is no time to be lost," thought Robin. "If I run to the village for help, he may be dead before I get back. If he could only move a little, I could almost carry him to the cottage. We must try;" and once more kneeling on the snow, he passed his strong young arm under the prostrate form, and tried to raise it. The man—for Robin could see that it was an old feeble man over whom he was stooping—seemed to understand what his helper was trying to do, and made some effort to rise, but sank down exhausted.



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“I must get help,” said Robin, aloud. “I will not be long. Here, wrap this round you while I am gone ;” and Robin pulled off his thick coat, and put it over the old man’s shoulders.

Was that a step on the soft snow? Was that some one moving among the trees? Why did Grip run backward and forward, as if uncertain whether to greet the new-comer or to remain with his master? Whose familiar touch was this on Robin’s shoulder?

“Oh, Nicholas, is it really you?” cried Robin. “You are just in time, you will help me. See, this old man is half-dead with cold, he can hardly move; but now there are two of us we can get him safe to the cottage. You take this arm and I the other; now, once, twice, thrice; there, it is done;” and the old man was standing at last, almost supported in the arms of his new friends.

Very slowly, with many a halt, they led him to the cottage. The movement was bringing a little warmth into his stiffened

limbs, and when at last they came in sight of the little window, through which the pine-log fire was sending such flashes of ruddy light, a shiver as of returning consciousness passed through his frame.

They led him into the room, leaving the door open, lest the sudden warmth might be too much for him, and let him sink down on the floor, supporting his head with the cushions from Nicholas's arm-chair. Robin bent over him to chafe his hands, and saw that his lips moved, though he could hardly catch the feeble sounds that passed through them.

"I am here at last ; I can die easier now," he seemed to say : and Nicholas answered, "We shall soon bring you round ; keep up heart, you are not going to die."

But Robin did not speak. He was gazing with white lips and eager eyes at the face before him, and as Nicholas looked at the two, he also became silent and awestruck. How was it that in the ghastly, worn face, half covered with long beard and neglected

hair, in the hollow cheeks and sunken dull eyes, he yet saw the look of a face that he knew—of the very face now bending over the old man as he lay, the bright young face of the friend whom he loved?

“Nicholas,” said Robin, rising and seizing his friend’s arm with almost painful force as he drew him aside, “Nicholas, it is my father.”





CHAPTER XII.

THE UNEXPECTED GUEST.

THOUGH Robin had spoken in a low tone, yet at the sound of the last word the old man moved his head restlessly, as if it stirred some hidden memory, and began to speak to himself in a thick troubled voice. “‘Father’—yes, that is what he used to call me. I was a father once, but I shall never see him again. Poor Robin, he used to call me ‘father’, but he wouldn’t know me now. I was a bad father to him, poor lad.”

“I am here, father: don’t you know me?” said Robin, in a steady, firm voice, bending

down, so that the firelight shone full on his face.

A moment's light came into the dull eyes, there was almost a smile on the pinched lips, but the poor wanderer was too benumbed in mind as well as body to show, or even to feel, much surprise. The longing which had directed his steps towards the old cottage where he had left his boy had brought the thought of his son very clearly before his mind. It was the one impression which had remained when so much else had been lost, and it seemed almost natural to find himself once more in the old kitchen, and hear his boy's voice call him "father."

Nicholas stood aside, stunned and bewildered, unable to feel that the return for which he had so prayed had brought with it anything but trouble and confusion; almost forgetting to pity the father in his sorrow for what seemed such a sudden blight on the young happy life of the son.

Not so Robin. As yet no remembrance of himself had come to lessen or change the

intense pity which filled his heart as he looked at the feeble old man before him, and thought how he had seen him leave that cottage door, five years ago, strong, hale, and active, to return — thus. He bent over him with loving care, gently putting back the dry scattered hair from the hollow cheeks and deeply-lined forehead ; soothing him with loving words, which seemed to reach his ear and sense, in spite of the torpor which kept him silent, for a smile, almost of peace and content, crept over his face.

The poor man was still too feeble for them to think it possible that he could climb the steep stairs leading to the little room above ; so Robin and Nicholas set to work to make him as comfortable as they could where he lay, and decided that they would watch beside him, by turns, all night. The supper which Robin had prepared as a welcome for his friend was scarcely tasted ; and some of to-morrow's beef was put on the fire, to make some strong tea for their patient, which they gave him from a spoon, Nicholas

supporting his head, while Robin fed his father as he would a sick child.

Robin had the last watch, and sat in the armchair, watching his father's uneasy slumbers, as the first gray dawn stole through the frosted panes. He had had no sleep that night: even when he had stretched himself on the bed, it had not been to rest; and now he felt weak and exhausted. How dull looked the life which stretched before him so brightly but a few hours ago, how hard the path which he had chosen to follow.

And in that hour of weakness, when resolve is feeble and love cold, and when difficulties seem to grow doubly strong, Satan was ready, too, to turn him aside from the right course by every argument and device. For the first time Robin began to doubt whether indeed it was his duty to give up all for the sake of the father who had never been a real father to him. He began to think of what the Squire had said, and to wonder whether it were likely that he, a poor lad, could know better what was right

than the learned gentleman who has so long an experience of life.

When Nicholas came down about eight o'clock he found his friend still sitting in the large cushionless chair, his face white and anxious, his eyes fixed upon his sleeping father with an irresolute, troubled expression, which Nicholas did not understand.

"Yon's the bells," cried Nicholas, his face lighting up, as a joyous peal from the old tower welcomed the Christmas morning. "Hearken, Robin;" and he opened the outer door, letting in a burst of winter sunshine with the distant music.

Robin rose, and walked slowly to the door, and the two friends stood together on the threshold.

"What are you going to do?" asked Nicholas, glancing inward for a moment towards the form on the floor.

"Oh, Nicholas," answered Robin, almost with a groan, "don't you ask me yet. I scarce know where I am, nor what's happened, nor what is right. I feel confused

and giddy, and as if everything was slipping away from me, just when I most wanted to get sure hold of it."

Nicholas looked with ready sympathy into the agitated face, and held his friend's hand for a moment in a close, strong clasp. He said nothing ; but in his heart he prayed to God to help his friend to do right, at any cost, and to make his way plain.

When the bells began to ring for church, Nicholas said, in a cheerful voice, " You go, Robin ; one of us is enough to tend your father, and it is no use my going. I couldn't so much as find my way there alone." And Robin, weary and downhearted, was glad to go, if it were only that he might find himself alone under the trees, with no one to watch his face, as he let his painful thoughts have their own way for a while.

The silence soothed him, so did the clear frosty sky, the slow movement of the tasselled pines, the thousand sweet influences of the familiar scene: and it was with calmer thoughts that he entered the old porch--

through the crowd of villagers in their best clothes, who were loitering in the churchyard, waiting till the bell should cease — and took his place in a dark corner of the church. In the place itself there were no associations of the past, for as a child his feet had never crossed the threshold of God's house, but the words of prayer and praise and teaching recalled the best hopes and purposes of later days, and drew his heart with fresh love to that dear Saviour who had laid aside all for his sake.

“He did all for me,” said Robin, half aloud, as he walked home slowly and alone, avoiding even the pleasant smile of little Lettice, and the merry greeting of his old companion Jonas. “There was not anything that was His that He was not willing to give up, that He might save even such a poor lad as I am ; and oh ! I ought to be so glad to be able to give up some little thing for Him — yes, to give up all, if it were needed, so that my father, whom Christ loves, might be saved by His love.”

The doubt and the darkness were passing from his mind, the clouds were being drawn up by the sunshine of love. He did not need to think whether or no he was doing what was written down in the commandments. For once this obedience, this safe, sure, strong guide through so many of the perplexed ways of life, was lost sight of in the intense love and gratitude which longed to do even more, which would fain sell all that he had, if so he might the better follow his dear Lord. His steps grew quicker and lighter as he drew near the cottage; his mind was at peace; now he would tell the Squire of his father's return the first thing next morning, and then he would be prepared for what he knew must follow—the loss of his home and his employment. They would all go away together, and Robin would find some humble work by which he could earn bread for his father, and keep Nicholas near him.

It was quite a cheerful scene on which the winter sun and the blazing Christmas fire

shone, as Robin opened the cottage door. Nicholas, with his deft fingers, had tidied the disordered room, had helped the old man, revived by his night's rest and breakfast, into the chair by the fire, and covered his torn dress with Robin's overcoat. His face was washed, and his hair and beard carefully trimmed and brushed, and there was almost a smile on his face, as he sat waiting his boy's return.

They drew round the fire after dinner. Robin heaped the hearth with fresh pine-logs, and the old man spread out his hands towards the cheerful, friendly warmth.

"Here, Nicholas, you have the chair, and I will sit on the stool beside you, father," said Robin, in a pleasant voice; "and I will tell you what I've been doing these five years. You want to hear, don't you?" and in his voice there was a longing desire for some word of affection, some response to cheer him through the painful sacrifice that in his heart he had already made.

But there was silence, and Robin, with a

sense of bitter disappointment, was slowly drawing back the hand which he had laid on his father's knee, when he felt a hot tear fall on it, and looking up quickly, he saw others slowly rolling down the old man's worn cheeks.

"I don't deserve it, I know I don't deserve it," said he, with a groan. "I've suffered enough in my mind for leaving you, boy — suffered bitter and sore, but I never felt so sorry till now; my heart is like to break. God forgive me!" There was a pause, and the father went on presently, taking his hands from before his face. "But it has turned out well for you, lad, though it don't make my fault the lighter. You have turned into a gentleman; you might be the Squire's son, to hear you speak; and yet you are not ashamed of me, nor my rags, God bless you!"

As he spoke, his eyes were fixed tenderly on his son, but when he mentioned the Squire's name, a moment's expression of anger passed over his face, until he looked

like the father whom Robin remembered in the old days.

Robin hesitated. How would his father receive the tidings that the son owed his education and change of circumstances to the man whom his father had wronged, and whom he evidently hated as of old, believing him to be the cause of all he had suffered? Would it not be well to wait a while, until the Squire had been told?

At this moment there was a sound of footsteps on the crisp, frosted snow without, evidently coming directly towards the cottage. The old man began to tremble, and made a movement as though he would rise from his chair and hide himself, but he sank back exhausted with the effort. A rap on the door, as from a stick, three quick decided taps, and before Robin could cross the floor the latch was lifted, and the Squire himself stood before the astonished group. His face was more smiling and genial than usual, and there was warmth in his tone as he wished them all a merry Christmas. He

glanced towards the two by the fire, and said to Robin, "Your friend, I suppose," but made no remark about the guest in the easy chair, whom indeed he scarcely seemed to notice. Robin set a chair for his master, and remained standing himself, his face expressing so much trouble and perplexity, that, had the Squire looked at him, he must have seen at once that something unusual had occurred; but he was not very used to reading the faces about him, and was, besides, absorbed in the errand which had brought him out that Christmas afternoon.

"I had a letter, Wallack," he said, "this morning from the rector, about those people at Longworth farm that I told you must be turned out. They are in very heavy trouble, it seems; sickness, as well as the failure of crops, and their youngest child dead or dying. The rector, an old college crony of mine, speaks highly of the father, and begs hard that I would wait another quarter before proceeding to extremities: he says they will be utterly ruined if they are turned

out. It's against my principles, and I doubt whether the example will do good ; but I shall let it stand over awhile, and perhaps forgive them a quarter when I see some effort really made. But, of course, of this you will say nothing."

"I, sir?" asked Robin, almost in surprise, for in his own mind he had already ceased to be trusted with the Squire's affairs, and he almost forgot that the Squire could not know the change that one night had made—a night that seemed now to be weeks ago.

"Yes, I want you to ride over to Longworth the first thing to-morrow morning: that is what brought me down here now. The truth is, Robin," and the Squire laughed a little, "I must be getting old. I find I can't properly enjoy the day so long as I have those poor folks on my mind ; but it is all right, now I have given you your orders."

While Robin stood hesitating how to answer, the Squire glanced with some interest round the little room, and this time his eye rested on the stranger guest by the fireside.

A pale face, with gleaming angry eyes, was fixed on his—a face in which fear and hatred were strangely mixed, as they were also in the shrinking attitude and upraised hand.

The Squire turned hastily to Robin for explanation. “Who is this? Have you broken your word to me, Wallack?” he said, harshly.

“I found my father dying in the woods last night,” replied Robin, slowly, “and I brought him home. I was coming to tell you the first thing to-morrow morning. I have not broken my word, sir. I knew that I ceased to be your servant when my father came back.”

“‘Servant,’ his servant,” muttered the elder Wallack, in an angry tone. “I’d sooner see my son starve than he should demean himself to serve such as you. Ay, you can look as fierce as you please, but I’m not afraid of you.”

“Oh, sir, he does not know what he is saying; pray do not listen to him!” cried

Robin, in great distress: but the Squire, with an angry flush on his face, was already crossing the threshold into the dusky shadows of the pine wood, and Robin, afraid to displease him more by following, could do nothing but try to soothe his father's agitation, whose sudden anger was passing, now that the Squire was gone, into terror at the thought of the punishment which he had braved by his return.

"Hide me! hide your poor old father!" he cried, trembling. "The police will be here; they will drag me off to jail, and I will never live to come out."

His terror redoubled when the Squire, returning, beckoned to Robin to come and speak with him outside the door. "Wallack," he said, sternly, "I would rather end this matter now. You need not come to the Hall again; after what has passed, all relations between us are at an end. I will send you the sum due to you, and allow you a week to make your plans and leave the cottage."

"I see you were right, sir," said Robin, with a sigh. "You could not let my father stay here, but you see how broken and ill he is, sir. I couldn't leave him. Oh, don't think me ungrateful."

"I look to deeds not words," said the Squire, curtly: "but you must choose your own way. I have no more to say about the matter;" and he turned to go.

"Oh, sir," cried Robin, despairingly, "if you would only give my duty to Madam and Miss Florence, and tell them I shall never forget their goodness, and that I'm not ungrateful." But the Squire was gone.

What a miserable Christmas Day it seemed. But it is just when everything is dark around us that God's light has most power to cheer and comfort; and there was peace in Robin's heart as he stood alone under the pine trees, for every act of obedience, every effort of faith, is a fresh covenant, binding the soul to God: and He comes, when we have laid aside the treasures that were only of earth, and says to us,

as we kneel before Him, poor and forsaken, "Fear not, I am thy Shield and thine exceeding great Reward."

"Come and comfort your father," said Nicholas, presently; "he'll not hearken to me.

"Nicholas, you forgive me!" said Robin, in a low tone. "I am breaking up your life as well as my own."

"Forgive you!" exclaimed Nicholas, wringing his hand. "Why, old fellow, 'tis all the same to me, so that we are together; and I'm happier to see you doing the right thing, though it is hard, than to share a fortune with you."

Hand-in-hand they went back to the fire-side, where Robin's presence seemed at once to soothe and tranquilize his father. The dusk was coming on, and filled the little chamber, where the log fire had died into a red glow. They could scarcely see each other's faces now, but Robin held his father's wrinkled hand in his, and the touch gave him comfort and strength.

Presently Nicholas began to sing ; it was a Christmas carol of long ago, the words of which came softly through the dusky twilight :

“His dwelling it was neither,
In housen nor in hall,
Nor in a lordly chamber,
But by the oxen’s stall:”

he sang. “He had not where to lay His head,” he said, in a low tone, like a half-spoken thought, as he finished the verse.

“That was like me last night ; ay, and for many a night before,” said the old man, catching the words.

“It was to save us, father, because He loved us so ; it is Jesus our Saviour that Nicholas means, who had not where to lay His head.”

“Ah, boy,” said the old man, sadly, “I know nothing of it. Time was I did, but I’ve forgot it all. There’s many a day, since I’ve been so broken and poor and ill, I’ve felt after it, and would have given a deal, if I’d had it, to lay hold of a thought

to comfort me. I never taught you nought of it, Robin, but you've learnt it: and now 'tis my boy must teach his father. I'm willing to learn."

"We'll learn together, please God," said Robin; and in the darkness none could see the happy tears in his eyes. "I know just nothing, but God has promised to teach us. Nicholas shall read us a chapter now, for it's time we got you to bed, father; and you wouldn't mind, would you, if we said a bit of a prayer together, to thank God for bringing you back?"

In the course of the next day came an envelope from the Squire, in which was enclosed the money which would have been due to Robin at the end of the first quarter; and, better even than this, a letter of recommendation from the Squire to a gentleman who was the head of some large iron-works in a town about thirty miles distant. Robin dared not go up to the Hall again, but he wrote a grateful letter, in which he tried to express his thankfulness for the

past ; and he said to himself that surely the future years would bring with them some means of showing the feeling which he was sure would never die out of his heart.





CHAPTER XIII.

THE THIRD CHRISTMAS EVE.

TWO years had gone by, and the Christmas snow was spread over the earth for the second time since Robin had crushed it under his feet as he passed through the pine wood on that well remembered Christmas Eve. It was not on soft yielding mounds of crisp snow that he was treading now, as he hurried towards his home, his heart seeming to beat time the while to the music of the bells, which from many a church steeple around were telling that Christmas had come again.

In a little house in one of the smaller

streets of the town his father and Nicholas were waiting for his return, listening, as they sat side by side over the fire, for the pleasant sound of his footfall without. Many a quick step came down the street, but none paused before the door, and the old man began to move uneasily in his chair, and Nicholas rose and walked across the floor to the tall clock that stood in the corner, as if to try and convince himself that it was not really much later than the usual hour of Robin's return.

"Here he is at last," cried the old man, joyfully, but Nicholas shook his head. "As if I didn't know my boy's step," triumphantly, as it paused at the door. But there was a knock. Robin would have lifted the latch and entered; and wondering, Nicholas crossed the kitchen and looked out into the dark street.

No one was there; he gazed up and down, and then took a step out into the street, that he might look round the corner, for he felt sure that his ears had not deceived him. He

stumbled and nearly fell over something which stood on the threshold, and which he had not seen while looking above it for Robin's tall head. His exclamation of surprise brought the elder Wallack to his side, and together they examined the large strongly-fastened hamper, which was almost too much for their united strength, as they tried to drag it into the light.

“‘Mr. Robin Wallack,’” read Nicholas: “it must wait till he comes home. But whatever can it be?”

“To think that I shouldn't know my boy's step,” mused the old man. “I could have been as sure as anything that he brought it to the door his own self.”

“Right, father,” cried a merry voice, as Robin appeared out of the darkness, and seizing the hamper, bore it into the circle of firelight. “But for all that, I know no more about it than you do. It came by rail, and was left at the works for me this afternoon: that's all I know about it.”

“Open it, boy, open it,” said his father.

"It must be full of bricks, to be so heavy: 'tis a joke, depend upon it. Who is to send us a Christmas hamper? Why, we've not a friend in the world that I know of."

"'Tis a good practical joke, father," answered Robin, laughing, as he cut the string and forced open the hamper lid, "one I shouldn't mind seeing repeated, for my part;" and raising a clean white cloth that was spread over the top, he lifted out a plump turkey, its white breast decorated with a chain of sausages.

Nicholas was silent with surprise, but Wallack seized the prize, exclaiming, "I know the breed, there's no such turkeys as these bred off the old Squire's land. 'Tis your doing, Robin: you've been writing to the old place, to get them to send us some Christmas fare."

"Not a bit of it, father. I can give a good guess who sent the hamper, but I knew nothing about it till the parcel cart left it at the works. But come, there's plenty beside the turkey; and see here, father, this is a

letter: now we shall know all about it." And Robin went to the fire, to read his letter by its light, while Wallack and Nicholas went on with their pleasant work, taking out a home-cured ham, a few fresh eggs, a pat of firm yellow butter, while every spare corner was filled with hard rosy-cheeked apples and russet pears.

"And here's a sprig of holly all ready for the pudding," said Nicholas, holding it up to Robin, who only nodded, and bent over his letter eyes which were full of happy tears.

"Let us hear the letter, and all about it," said the elder Wallack, a little impatiently. "I was right about your step, and I was right about the turkey too, I'll be bound. Isn't it from the old place, now? But who should think of us there, passes me."

"It is from the Squire, father," said Robin, gently, coming to the old man's side, and laying his hand on his arm, "and there's a message in it for you; will you hear it now?"

"Ay, ay, why not?" said Wallack, seat-

ing himself. "Don't you go, Nicholas ; read the message, Robin, boy ;" but the old man's voice trembled a little as he spoke.

"Tell your father," read Robin, "that I hope he will be able to enjoy the Christmas cheer. Perhaps when you tell him what I have said to you, he will be able to forgive me for sending you away two years ago. In any case I want him to believe that I do forgive him from my heart the wrong he did me, even as I trust that God will, for Christ's sake, pardon me."

"That doesn't read much like the Squire," said Wallack, doubtfully. "I don't understand it. What has he said to you, lad ?"

"Father," answered Robin, with almost a sob in his voice, "he says Will I come back again ?"

"And you shall go," said Wallack, with a sudden firmness in his voice. "I have learnt a little these two years ; and though I can never be a help to my boy as a father ought to be, I'll stand in your way no longer. You shall go. They'll find a corner for me in

the poor house, and 'tis there I should have been these two years, by rights ; but I can scarce be sorry, Robin, for then, how should I have learnt of Him ! But I shan't be alone now. I'm but an ignorant old man, and no company for any one, but yet He takes pity on me, and He'll come and speak to me, and comfort me when you are far away."

Robin laid his hand on the feeble, shaking arm, which would never again recover its strength. "Why, father, you must be dreaming, to think I'm like to leave you," he said, smiling. "Squire knows better than that. He wants you to come back too, and Nicholas, and all. Nicholas is to be schoolmaster. Hurrah ! hurrah !" and Robin jumped up to clap his friend on the back. "He has written to the clergyman about you, Nicholas, and heard all sorts of fine things about your learning and your music, and nought will content him but you must have the school. Do you remember setting up school with one pupil, eh, lad ?"

"He has been trouble enough, for a school

full," answered Nicholas, smiling quietly, and beginning in his orderly fashion, to put away the contents of the hamper, and clear the hay from the floor; but there was a light in his eye, and a smile on his thin lips which Robin rejoiced to see.

"Here's something else in the hay—another letter," said Nicholas, handing a sealed note to Robin.

"It's from Miss Florence," said Robin, flushing with surprise. "Oh, father! O, Nicholas! Miss Florence has written to me, her own self, to ask me to come back. She is going to be married, she says, come the New Year, and she must have me at the wedding; and then, she says, I can look over the place, and get all ready for you, father, and for Nicholas. Oh, dear, I feel almost too happy."

The old man had sat, meanwhile, his eyes fixed on the fire, as if he saw in its glowing hollows, pictures of the past and the future, and slow, painful, rare tears rolled down his furrowed cheeks; yet they were tears which

made his heart lighter, for they were born of penitence, and never were bright with the sunlight of thanksgiving.

Presently he looked up. "You'll tell the Squire as I humbly ask his pardon, and that I'm more thankful than I can say, to come back to the old place to die. Say, he has given me the blithest Christmas that I ever knew. 'Tis like the blessed words you read this morning, Robin, 'Peace on earth, good will toward men.' My heart is lighter than it has been since that miserable night, better than seven years gone. I seem to believe now that God for Christ's sake has forgiven my sin."

That night, when Nicholas was alone in his room, he heard a light tap at his door. "Come in," he said, for he knew that it was Robin, and he laid his hand on his arm, and drew him to sit down by him on the side of the bed.

"God is very good," he said in a low tone, that was like an echo of Robin's thoughts.

"Yes," replied Robin; "and the best hap-

piness of all, is to feel that God has been good to us all along ; just as good when he sent the trouble, as now that we are so happy. He has been with us all along, Nicholas, and that makes the gladness."

"And that is a gladness," said Nicholas, as if thinking aloud, "that can never come to an end. Though I daresay we shall be glad and sorry again a great many times in the course of our lives, yet there will always be the promise, 'If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love.' "



Harry's Perplexity.







HARRY'S PERPLEXITY.

CHAPTER I.

HARRY'S ADVENTURE.

IN a bright sunny August afternoon, Harry Rivers was walking briskly along the crowded London streets. It was evident that he was on his way home from school, for he carried some books, held together by a stout strap, and a slate. It was equally evident that he was going home to his dinner; not that he looked by any means starved or miserable, but still you

would have felt sure that he wanted neither clock nor watch to remind him of the dinner hour.

Harry was a pleasant-looking boy about twelve years old, well but plainly dressed; not handsome by any means, though he had fine brown eyes, full of sense and spirit; a tall, awkward boy most people thought him, but his little sister at home thought no one was to be compared to him, in looks or anything else. And this alone would give me a good opinion of him; it is a good sign when a big boy is kind to his little sisters.

He walked quickly along, as I have said, until he came to a shop on Regent street, the windows of which were full of prints and photographs. Here he stopped, leaning against the brass bar that defended the glass, and gazed long and steadily at one particular print. His face grew grave; nay, almost sad, as he looked, and his lips moved as if he were speaking, though no sound was heard from them. The engraving before him was taken from a well-known picture. It

represented the poor little French king, Louis xvii, who died in prison in Paris during the Revolution about eighty years ago. It is a sad picture, as you may imagine; the poor little child-king, half dressed, and apparently half starved, crouched upon the ground, leaning against the wall. And, oh! what a mournful, despairing look there is in his little face — the pretty, childish face, which his beautiful mother had kissed so fondly when it was bright and rosy and intelligent. But that happy time seemed long, long ago — the child had almost forgotten it. Mother, father, both were dead; his last friend, kind, gentle Madame Elizabeth, was gone too — all murdered by the cruel people who were murdering their desolate little prisoner as surely as if they had sent him to the guillotine with his unhappy parents.

All these thoughts, and many more, passed through the mind of Harry Rivers as he gazed intently on the picture, with his bright brown eyes full of pity and sympathy. How long he might have remained thus gazing,

forgetting the dinner he had wanted so much but a few minutes before, I do not know; but he was somewhat unpleasantly aroused. A gentleman, with a brown pocket-book in his hand, into which he was putting a paper, as he walked quickly on, ran against poor unconscious Harry, and knocked the slate out of his hand.

It fell with a great clatter upon the pavement, and was broken into several pieces. This brought the gentleman to a stand. He was a well-dressed, well-looking old man, but his face was stern, and there were deep lines in his forehead, as if he were in the habit of frowning. He looked at Harry with a frown now, as he thrust the pocket-book into his pocket, and said in a harsh, gruff voice,

“You young blockhead, what do you mean by standing in the way?”

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said Harry, laughing; “I’m sorry I was in your way, but of the two I think I got the worst of it.”

And he pointed to the broken slate.

“Serve you right, sir ; serve you right,” growled the old gentleman. “Don’t expect that I shall pay for it, for I shan’t ; you’ve no right to stand blocking up the pathway, and I shall not give you a sixpence !”

Harry reddened with indignation at this rude speech.

“Wait until I ask you for it, sir !” said he ; “I should not take it if you offered it to me.”

The old gentleman passed on briskly, and Harry following, with his head held very high. They happened to be going in the same direction, and there were a good many people about, as of course several had stopped to see what had happened. Among these there was a stout lad of about sixteen, who had looked on with much interest, and now followed the old man closely ; and, presently, what did Harry see to his great surprise, but this youth quietly put his hand into the old gentleman’s pocket, and softly draw out the brown pocket-book ! It was so quickly and skilfully done that most peo-

ple in Harry's place would not have perceived it, but fortunately those brown eyes of his were very keen and observant.

Letting his books fall, he darted upon the thief, caught him by the collar, shouting "Police! police!" with all his might. Several people stopped at the shout, and a policeman might be seen running up, but not very quickly. Now the young gentleman who had made so free with his neighbor's pocket had many excellent reasons for avoiding an interview with a policeman, so when he caught sight of the blue uniform drawing near he made a violent effort, flung Harry off so roughly that he fell flat on his back, pitched the brown pocket-book in the face of a man who attempted to lay hold of him, and fled swiftly away.

The policeman sprang forward in pursuit, but unfortunately (fortunately, no doubt the thief thought) he fell over the prostrate form of Harry Rivers, and in the consequent confusion the runaway disappeared.

The testy old gentleman had turned back



The Stolen Pocket-Book. — Page 200.

on hearing Harry's shouts, and was now very red in the face with hurry and consternation, having missed his pocket-book.

"My pocket-book, policeman! my pocket-book is gone. It contains papers of consequence — papers that I would not lose on any account."

"Is this it, sir?" said the policeman, producing it.

"Yes, that's it! You will find my name, Henry Marshall, written inside."

"All right, sir," replied the policeman, after opening the book and examining the name.

"How did you find it, policeman?" inquired Mr. Marshall, producing a well-filled purse from an inner pocket.

"This boy, sir" (pointing to Harry), "this boy saw it took, I suppose, and he laid hold of him and sung out like a good one; and though the fellow ran when he saw me coming, he thought it better to leave your book behind him."

"Which boy? — there are a couple of

dozen boys here ! I'm glad the rascal got away, for I'm leaving town to-night, and could not have waited to appear against him without great inconvenience."

"If I catch him, I shall let you know, sir, so please give me your address. This is the boy, sir."

Harry, laughing and coloring, was pushed forward by the crowd ; the old gentleman laughed a little too when he recognized him.

"So, boy, you saved my pocket-book !"

"Yes, sir ; at least I saw it taken and sung out for the police ; and, after all," he added reproachfully to the officer, "you let him get clean off."

"Well, there are several papers of great value to me in this book ; it is worth several hundred pounds to me ; though if the rascal had succeeded it would have been worthless to him. But you have obliged me very much, boy, and I shall give you a handsome reward."

"No, sir, thank you," answered Harry, firmly but civilly ; I cannot take a reward ; I

cannot take money that I have not worked for, and this is nothing at all. Good-bye, sir."

He was turning away when Mr. Marshall put his hand upon his shoulder and stopped him.

"Stay one moment, boy. I like your spirit, and though I will not again offer you a reward, perhaps I may be able to befriend you some time or other. Here is my card; keep it by you, and if at any time you should want employment come to me, and if, on inquiry, I am satisfied about you, I will help you on in life; for you are a fine, independent fellow — a very fine boy indeed,"

Harry put the card in his pocket, made his very best bow, and they parted.

The excitement over, Harry again be-thought himself of his long-delayed dinner; he was by this time very hungry indeed; and was besides afraid that his mother would be getting anxious about him. The policeman had picked up his books and restored them to him, so there was nothing more to detain

him ; and he set off running as fast as he could in so crowded a place. Very soon he turned out of Regent Street, and having walked some distance he stopped at a dull-looking house, most of the rooms of which were let out to lodgers. He opened the door by the aid of a latch-key, and ran upstairs. He passed the closed doors of the first floor, and soon made his appearance in a good-sized front room a story higher, where he was welcomed with cries of glee from his baby sister.

The room was clean and neat, but plainly, nay, scantily furnished, boasting neither carpet nor curtains. Near one window stood a large square table, covered with needle-work, and beside it sat a gentle-looking lady, busily at work in making up a rich blue silk dress.

The costly material made her worn stuff gown look even shabbier than it really was, and the bright color made her pale face look paler still. Yet, though Mrs. Rivers looked shabby and pale, she was evidently a lady,

and her face had a very peaceful, happy expression. She had bright brown eyes, too, like her son's.

On the ground sat a pretty little girl, three years old, whose merry face lighted up with fresh smiles at the sight of her brother, to welcome whom she rose to her feet and pattered across the room.

"Here I am at last, mother darling! Did you think I was lost? I wish you had not waited for me. I've had an adventure, but I must tell you about it at dinner. I'm so jolly hungry! Is father come home?"

"No, my love; he cannot come home until evening. Dinner has been ready for some time, so if you will wash your hands we can sit down at once."

She laid her work carefully aside as she spoke, and when they had all washed their hands they went into a small room near the larger one. Harry carried May down, perched upon his shoulder, where she screamed with delight, and pulled his thick hair as hard as she could with her little fat hands.

May was a very pretty child, fair and rosy, with soft rings of golden hair all over her head, and beautiful blue eyes. She was such a merry, good-tempered little fairy, too — the sunshine of the house, her brother called her. She sat beside him now, and, hungry as he was, he got her dinner ready before he began to eat his own.

Presently Mrs. Rivers inquired,

“What was your adventure, Harry? you have not told me yet.”

“Something like an adventure, mamma! To begin with, I was standing at my shop window looking at the print I am copying, when an old gentleman ran slap against me, knocked my slate out of my hand and smashed it. Well, instead of saying, ‘I beg your pardon,’ or ‘I am sorry,’ as one would have expected, he said, ‘Serve you right for blocking up the way.’ If you had only seen how he frowned at me! and his voice growled and grated just like this, ‘Serve you right, boy! serve you right!’” And Harry grunted out the words in the deepest bass he could master.

Mrs. Rivers had been listening with a smile until this moment; but when Harry imitated the old gentleman's way of speaking, she started slightly.

"Well, Harry, what next? That is not *all*, surely."

"Oh *dear*, no! only the beginning of it. We were walking along, he in front and I a little behind him, when I saw a big boy pop his hand into my old man's pocket and take his pocket-book. I rushed up, seized the thief, and called the police, but the rogue was bigger and stronger than I, so before the policeman arrived he contrived to knock me down and make off; but he thought fit to leave his prey behind him. It turned out to be something of great value, and the old fellow wanted to give me money, but of course I wasn't going to have that. Then he gave me his card, and bid me keep it and come to him if I ever wanted help or employment, and ended all with, 'You're a fine boy! a very fine boy! as if he was rather annoyed with me for *being* a fine boy.'

'Much you know about me, old felle &,'
thought I."

"Show me the card, Harry. What is the name?"

Harry, after some searching in his pockets, produced the card, and read,

"Mr. Henry Marshall, 15, — Square,
and 139, Lily Pot Lane."

"Why, mamma!" he exclaimed, in surprise, "that's my name! I'm Henry Marshall too. Is not that very odd?"

But, glancing at his mother, he saw that her eyes were full of tears. She took the card from his hand, and looked at it in silence for a few minutes. Then she said, in a low voice,

"That is my father, Harry."

"Your father! Why, mamma, I always fancied that you had none—I mean, of course, I thought he was dead."

"Did you tell him your name, Harry?"

"No: he did not ask it. There was such a noise and uproar, we could scarcely hear each other's voices. But to think of his

being your father! Why do we never see him?"

"Ah, my boy! that is a long, long story, and a very sad one, too; but you must know it some day. Finish your dinner, and when I am at work again I will tell you all about it."

"I have finished, and so has Mayblossom, I perceive, so I shall just call Sally and follow you upstairs."

"Put May on oo solda," cried the child, coaxingly. So she went upstairs as she had come down, perched upon her brother's "solda."

Mrs. Rivers was soon again at work upon the blue silk, while pretty May nursed a frightful wooden doll, which she loved with all her heart, and sincerely believed to be a beauty. Harry brought out from his cupboard in the corner a drawing-board and a box of chalks, and establishing himself at a distant corner of the table, set to work also in good earnest.

Before I tell you what Mrs. Rivers said,

I must explain about Harry's drawing. He had, from the time when he was no older than little May, shown very considerable talent; but his mother, the only person who saw his attempts, knew nothing whatever of drawing beyond what is taught as a matter of course at a good school. She had no natural taste for it, and so, although she was very glad that her boy liked it well enough to find a quiet, constant enjoyment in the possession of a few sheets of cartridge paper and a box of chalks, she had no idea that his drawings proved him to be possessed of talent of no common order. That corner cupboard, which belonged exclusively to Harry, was filled to overflowing with drawings. Little rough sketches, imperfect, of course, but very clever and life-like. There were a great many of his mother, with May upon her knee; his father in various attitudes, or, as he most often saw him, asleep in his easy-chair; May with the frightful doll; May with the kitten. These were his most frequent subjects. But latterly he had

begun to copy prints, having a great wish to possess copies of some that he saw in the shop windows. Not being able to afford to hire them for copies, he hit upon the plan of taking a good long look at the one he was at work upon when coming home from school, and then attempting to draw it in the afternoon. Now, any artist will tell you how very difficult this is; in fact, to draw from memory is one of the last things that artists attempt, so it was quite wonderful that Harry could do it at all. Not that he succeeded as well as he wished, for his copies were full of faults and inaccuracies, but it was wonderful to see how he caught the expression of the faces.

He sat looking discontentedly at his outline of the little Dauphin, muttering to himself,

“His head is too big, and I forgot ‘the cap of liberty,’ — that’s easily put in, however.” Then aloud, “Now, mamma, now for your story. Begin at once, please, for Owen Eastwood has got his father’s leave to take

me home with him to see some of his pictures — he's an artist, you know. And Owen said that if he found to-day would be convenient to him he would call for me at four o'clock."

"That's very kind of him. I shall be quite glad to see this friend of yours, Harry, I have heard so much of him. What made him think of showing you the pictures?"

"He walks home part of the way with me sometimes, and yesterday I was taking off a bit of my copy on my slate, and that made us talk of drawing. Owen don't like drawing, only fancy! and his father is quite vexed at it. Now for your story, mamma."

"Harry," said Mrs. Rivers, slowly, "I almost wish I had not promised to tell it, for I find it very painful to talk about it."

Her voice was low and broken, and the boy saw that her eyes were again full of tears.

"Then, mamma, don't tell me," he said, eagerly. "I can't say I'm not anxious, because I really am just boiling over with

curiosity ; but I shall get over it, never fear — anything rather than see you cry. I don't believe I *do* care to hear anything about that cross-grained old hunks !”

“ Oh don't, my darling ! don't speak in that way of your grandfather ! it is not right. I think, as the matter has been brought before you, Harry, I prefer to tell you all now ; for you must hear it some day, and you are old enough to understand it now ; something of it, at least.”

“ Then go on, mamma ; I am listening with all my ears,” said Harry ; “ and please begin by telling me is your father a rich man, for he seemed to be ?”

“ He is a very rich man indeed, and I am his only daughter.”

“ And he lets you make dresses to earn money, and papa work as a railway guard ! He is a nice old gentleman, upon my word.”

“ You will understand it better when I have told you my story. I have two brothers, you must know, both a good deal older than I am.”

“ My uncles, of course. It is so funny to hear of a whole lot of relations that I knew nothing about. Have you a mother too, mamma ? ”

“ Ah, no. If I had had a mother I should not have this story to tell. My mother died when I was born, and I sometimes think that perhaps this was the reason that my father never liked me as well as my brothers ; I put him in mind of his sorrow. He certainly did *not* love me, though he was kind to me in a careless way ; gave me a great many presents, and sent me to an excellent school when I was old enough. I had everything I could want ; the servants were made to take great care of me, and my father made a rule of seeing me at least once every day, and asking me if I had everything I wished for ; and if there was any fancy ungratified I had only to say so, and the order was given to get me what I desired. But his manner was cold and stern, and I do not remember his ever kissing me. My brothers were scarcely ever at home ; they were at school, and afterwards

went into a house of business abroad for a time."

"Why, mamma, you must have been dreadfully lonely."

"I was, and should have been more so but for your dear father. He was the son of an old friend of my father's, who had failed in business, and died very poor, leaving this one son. He was the youngest clerk in my father's house, and it was his duty to come every morning with papers from the office for my father to look over. Then he used to walk with me to school on his way back, as it did not delay him. My father asked him to do this, because one day a beggar frightened me and my maid as we were going alone. This came to be my happy time; he was so bright and cheerful, and so kind to me. I never heard kind, loving words but from him. Then I grew older, and ceased to go to school, but I took lessons in music, and used to go to my master's house, attended by a servant. My time for returning was later than the hour for closing the counting-house,

and Frank never failed to meet me, and walk home with me. We were very young, and meant no harm, doing it quite openly; but I think my maid was much to blame, for she must have known that my father would not have approved of these meetings."

"And then he found you out, and was awfully angry," said Harry, who was much interested in his mother's story.

"Not exactly. Frank himself spoke to him. I had left off taking lessons, and so we seldom met each other, and I was very lonely and unhappy. So Frank, who would not willingly have deceived any one, went to my father and told him how fond we were of each other, asking leave to come and see me sometimes; but my father was very angry indeed, and having sent for me, he told me unless I promised never to walk with Frank or see him any more he would dismiss him at once, without a moment's notice. I was frightened, but still at first I tried to persuade him to allow us to see each other, but all in vain. So I promised, and kept my

promise for a long time — a whole year. And it was the most miserable year I ever spent. One day, quite by accident, I met Frank; we could not pass by without a word, and I could not conceal from him how unhappy I was. After that we met again, *not* by accident.”

“And quite right of you!” exclaimed Harry.

“No, my dear boy. It was very wrong — in me particularly. I was disobeying my father and breaking my promise. I knew it was wrong, but was too weak to resist the temptation, and, as you will see, I have been punished. At last some one told my father. He kept his word, and dismissed Frank without giving him a character. Then he sent for his sister to live with him and take care of me. She was not kind to me, making me feel always that I was in disgrace, and my father was less like a father even than before. I am not saying this in anger, Harry. I wish I could tell you my story without blaming my father in any way, but I must tell you

the whole truth, or you might think that your father had been more to blame than he was—for the fault was chiefly mine. You are too young to understand this part of my story very well, so I shall not dwell upon it; my father told me plainly that if I married Frank he would never forgive me, or see me again. ‘You have deceived me, Mary,’ he said, ‘but you are very young, and I will forgive you this once, but only on condition that you obey me henceforth.’ We thought he would not keep his word, and that when we were married he would forgive us in time, but he never has.”

Mrs. Rivers was silent for a few minutes, and Harry, thought he wanted very much to comfort her, did not know how to set about it. Presently she went on:

“The little money we had to begin with was soon spent. Frank could get no employment because my father would not recommend him, and when you were born, Harry, we were in actual want. In despair, Frank applied for employment on the Great

Western, and was accepted. He took the post gladly for our sakes, though it is so much beneath him. But you see, Harry, I cannot forget that *I* brought him down to this; and I cannot help crying, even now, when I think of it."

Harry threw down his piece of chalk and came to her side.

"Mother darling," he said, kissing her fondly, "you must not fret about that! He would rather be a railway guard, and have you and May and me at home, than be a rich merchant without us. Why, only the other day he said to me that no honest work is beneath an honest man, and I quite agree with him; and your father is a savage old Turk, and sooner than be obliged to him I'll sweep a crossing! Where's his old card? I shall just walk downstairs and put it into the kitchen fire."

"No, no, Harry! keep it, dear. I like to think that your grandfather liked you, even though he did not know who you were. And you may need his help some day, though you don't think so now."

"Well, I shall keep it to please you, mamma. There, I have stowed it away in my cupboard: but I think it will be some time before I ask *him* for help — old Turk."

These last words were muttered into the cupboard, on the lowest shelf of which, among nails, tops, bits of string, old marbles, and other boyish treasures, Mr. Marshall's card was flung. Just then the door bell rang and Harry ran downstairs, presently returning with his friend and schoolfellow, Owen Eastwood.

Mrs. Rivers was much pleased to see that her boy's chosen friend was a steady-looking youth at least two years his senior. Owen, on his part, was much attracted by Mrs. Rivers' gentle countenance and pleasing manners, and by the beauty of little May. But as soon as he had begun to look at Harry's drawings, it was plain that he had eyes for nothing else.

"Who teaches you, Rivers?"

"Why, nobody!" said Harry, laughing.

"And you have no copy but the one in Regent Street?"

"None. I must go again before I finish the hands. I have not got them quite right, have I?"

"I think not, but I am no great judge, I'm sorry to say."

He went on looking at the drawings and turning them over much longer than Harry, who was burning with impatience to be off, thought at all necessary. At last he selected two or three sketches, and said,

"Will you lend me these, Harry?"

"Oh certainly — indeed, if you care for them, I will give them to you. But they are not worth having."

"We shall see about that. I am going to show them to my father."

"Oh no, Owen! please don't. Your father will laugh at me."

"I don't think he will; at all events I mean to try. But I will wait till you are gone, Rivers, so you need not look so unhappy."

"Oh, all right then!" said Harry brightening up again. "Shall we go now?"

Owen Eastwood lived near Kensington gardens, in a fine, large house with a pretty garden, for his father was making a great deal of money. It was getting dusk when the two boys arrived there; but dark as it was they found the artist, Paul Eastwood, still at work. He received Harry very kindly, and when he saw how delighted the boy was with the pictures, he left his easel and showed him many paintings and sketches, talking away to him in a loud, cheery voice like a great bell. Harry was as happy as a king, as the saying goes; much happier than poor little King Louis the xvii., at all events.

At last it was quite dark, and Harry remembered that his father would be coming home soon; so he thanked Mr. Eastwood very heartily and said good-bye. Owen went with him to the door and then returned to the studio, where he found his father, with a candle in his hand, standing before his easel again, intently looking at the picture on it.

"You are not going to work any more, are you, father?"

"No: only a last look at my day's work. Look here, Owen, don't you think that middle distance—but I forget, boy, you know nothing about it. Ah, Owen! I wish you were more of an artist."

"Well, dear dad, I am sure you cannot wish it more than I do; if wishes would do it, or hard work either, an artist I should assuredly be."

"Quite true, Owen! I know you did your best."

"But look at these sketches, father—what do you think of them?" said Owen, producing Harry's attempts. "I think I have known few boys who could draw like this untaught."

Mr. Eastwood glanced at the drawings, carelessly at first, but after that first look he seized them and held them up to catch the light.

"*Untaught*, you call him! Ah, there's nature's teaching here! Light the gas,

Owen ; let me see them well. Good — good — wonderfully good. Owen, if these were your own, I should be a happy man. There is life here ; look at that pretty little child, all smiles and dimples, and the woman so quiet and sad ; and the cat — oh, that cat alone is worth anything. Capital, capital ! What this ? Copied from Landseer — ‘ Dignity and Impudence ’ — but it is not nearly as good as I should have expected from the sketches.”

“ But when I tell you the print hung in a shop window, and that the artist never saw it except from the street ? ”

“ You don’t mean it ! then it is wonderful — wonderful. Good training for the eye, too ; otherwise copying prints is a sad waste of time. Who is it, Owen ? The boy with the bright brown eyes who was here just now ? I’m sure it is he — he looked clever.”

“ You are right ; that is the very fellow, Harry Rivers. I wish you could see the drawing he is doing now ; it is that print of the poor little Dauphin, you know. It

is not finished, but you should see the eyes ; so vacant, and yet so sad."

"He's a genius, that's what he is. I must see about him ; that boy's worth helping. Who is he, Owen ? What are his parents ?"

"Well, they are a mystery to me. His father is a guard on the Great Western, and he is one of the handsomest men I ever saw ; and quite a gentleman. His mother I never saw till to-day, but though she is a dressmaker, and was hard at work, you could never doubt that she is a lady. Harry is at my school, and some of the fellows hold him at arm's length because his father is only a railway guard, but I like him better than any of them. It was only the other day I found out that he is so fond of drawing."

"Fond of drawing !" shouted Mr. Eastwood. "A born artist, you mean ! He must be an artist. I must see about him. I shall go to-morrow and offer to teach him. It will be a pleasure to teach a fellow like that."

Poor Owen sighed. This was what he had hoped for when he brought Harry's drawings home with him, and he was glad ; but still he could not help sighing. He loved his warm-hearted, noisy father dearly, and had worked very hard to please him, but in vain. God had denied to the artist's son the gift which Harry Rivers had in such rich measure, and try as he would he could never draw well enough to please Mr. Eastwood.

The next day, at about twelve o'clock Mrs. Rivers was surprised to hear a very loud and very long rap at her door. The little girl who was her only servant was out, so she was obliged to lay down her work and go to the door herself. There she found a tall man, with bright merry eyes and an immense curly beard. He was quite a stranger to her, and she could not imagine what he had come for. However, she was not left long in doubt, for the stranger began, in a rich deep voice — so musical that one forgot how loud it was :

“My name, ma'am, is Eastwood — Paul

Eastwood, the artist; perhaps you have heard of me. My boy, Owen, brought your son to my house yesterday, and I have come here to ask you a question about him."

"Pray come in, sir," said Mrs. Rivers. "I shall have to ask you to walk up a great many stairs, for all the lower part of our house is let."

"You *are* Mrs. Rivers, then — good guess that of mine. I knew it by your eyes, ma'am, for your son has just the same."

They soon arrived at Mrs. Rivers' sitting-room, where May ran to her mother as soon as she saw the stranger.

"What a lovely child!" exclaimed Mr. Eastwood. "Just the innocent blue eyes I want for my 'Red Riding Hood.' Will you lend her to me, Mrs. Rivers? Don't look so frightened, baby, I'm not the wolf, though I do want you for 'Red Riding Hood.'"

Mrs. Rivers, if the truth must be told, was beginning to repent of her invitation to the artist to enter her house. She saw but few people in the course of her quiet life, and he

was so noisy, and so unlike any one she knew, that she half feared he was mad.

"Now, ma'am," began he, seating himself and looking about him. "Time is money, you know, and I must not waste either yours or my own. My son, ma'am — a very good boy he is, though he'll never be an artist, I'm sorry to say — showed me some drawings of *your* son's last night. Mrs. Rivers, if your boy were cast upon a desert island alone, he would be an artist."

"An artist, sir!" exclaimed Mrs. Rivers.

"Couldn't help it, ma'am," roared Mr. Eastwood, excitedly; "and all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't stop him, either. But, of course, he would get on quicker and better if he had a little help now, and that help I shall be proud to give him. What do you mean to make him?"

"We have hardly thought of that yet. Harry is only twelve. Perhaps he may get a place as a clerk by-and-by."

"A clerk! a counter-jumper, when he might be a Landseer! Mrs. Rivers, you

would not put a race-horse in a plough, would you ? ” .

“ No, sir,” said Mrs. Rivers, more than ever convinced that he was mad.

“ No, no ; let him begin at once to study with me. If he likes to make art his profession, he might do worse than begin with me. I'll make something of him, I assure you, ma'am.”

Mrs. Rivers looked quite bewildered.

“ Do you mean to say,” she at last inquired, “ that my Harry has talent enough to be an artist ? ”

“ Most emphatically I do, ma'am. I cannot say yet, of course, whether he has a natural eye for color, though from the remarks he made last night I should think it likely. But his sketches are full of talent — of genius, ma'am, genius. There's a cat, Mrs. Rivers, in one of those sketches that Owen brought home, that I may say mewed at me ; did, ma'am, I assure you. Have you any of his drawings at hand ? ”

By this time Mrs. Rivers was beginning to

understand her visitor better, so she went to Harry's cupboard and brought out a number of his drawings. After a little more conversation, Mr. Eastwood repeated his offer about Harry, and his mother began to think how happy it would make him.

"But I must tell you plainly, Mr. Eastwood, that we are very poor. We could not afford —"

"I understand that perfectly. Never mind that, Mrs. Rivers. I am well to do now, and can give Owen a decent education; but I was a poor boy once, and owe everything to a kind-hearted old lady who took a fancy to me. Now I can do the same for Harry."

"My husband must decide; but I feel sure he will be delighted that Harry should have such a chance. He will be home at about five o'clock, and I will tell him at once of your kind offer. Believe me, Mr. Eastwood, we shall never forget your kindness."

"Then I shall say good-bye, now, ma'am. And if all goes well, you will let Harry bring 'Red Riding Hood' to my studio some day, won't you?"

"Indeed I shall, with pleasure. Good-bye, Mr. Eastwood."

When Frank Rivers came home, tired and hungry, Mrs. Rivers no sooner saw him comfortably seated at his dinner, than she told him her story.

"Think of Harry, our Harry, being a genius, Frank. I assure you, Mr. Eastwood seemed quite surprised at his drawings."

"It is a long time since I saw them, but I remember thinking them rather amazing for such a little fellow. Where does he keep them? In the cupboard? Get your bonnet and shawl, Mary, and we will go together to Mr. Eastwood's; it will be a nice walk for you."

"But Frank, dear, are you not too tired to go out again? You looked so tired when you came in."

"So I was, but this good news and my good dinner have quite set me up again. Why, Mary, only think what a thing this may be for Harry!"

"I thought you would be pleased, dear."

"Of course I am. It will be the greatest comfort to me to know that our son will have a chance of rising to a position in life as good as that from which I took you, dear. Not that I think we could have cared more for each other if we had been rich — could we, Mary?"

"No; oh no, indeed," she answered, quickly.

They found Mr. Eastwood at home, and much pleased was he to find that he was to have his own way about Harry. It was arranged that for the future the boy should leave school at twelve o'clock, go home for his dinner, and spend the rest of the day at Mr. Eastwood's.

When Harry was informed of this arrangement, his delight knew no bounds. The boy loved his drawing for its own sake, without a thought beyond the present pleasure; but now he began to dream of all the fine things he would do when he was earning money as an artist. His mother should make no more dresses; his father should cease to be a rail-

way guard ; while as for the toys, bright sashes, and white frocks that were to be provided for May, half-a-dozen little girls could not have used them all.

Mr. Eastwood was very proud of his pupil's progress, which was really very rapid ; for, besides his decided talent, Harry had the yet more precious gift of industry. He did not care how hard he worked, allowing himself no idle time ; but it did not hurt him, as he got plenty of fresh air in his daily walks to Kensington, and was very happy in his new life.



CHAPTER II.

▲ MEMORABLE CONVERSATION.

TWO years passed away, and the greater part of a third, and things remained unaltered in the Rivers' family. Harry was now fifteen, a tall, strong lad for his age, working harder than ever under Mr. Eastwood.

It was a bright warm day in July, and Mrs. Rivers was laying by her work carefully—for May was restless, and she thought she would take her out for a little fresh air—when her servant came upstairs and told her that there was a gentleman at the door asking to see the rooms she had to let; for one of her lodgers had just gone away. She

went down at once, followed by May, who liked to see all that was to be seen.

The gentleman proved to be a person she knew very well by sight — Mr. Godfrey, a young clergyman, who had not long before been appointed one of the curates of the church which the Rivers attended. He recognized her too, for she was a regular attendant.

“I think,” said he, in a pleasant voice, “that we are not quite strangers. I have seen you and your little girl at St. Margaret’s, have I not?”

“Yes, sir; and you are Mr. Godfrey, I think? My husband knows you; he is in the choir, though he cannot attend regularly; but Mr. Lawrence is kind enough to overlook that, as he knows he cannot help it.”

“Is that Mr. Rivers your husband? I know him a little already, then, and should like to know him better. He has a most beautiful voice.”

“He has, sir, and is so very fond of music.”

"I called to-day, seeing a bill in your window, Mrs. Rivers. I want lodgings in this neighborhood, as it will be much more convenient to me to be near my work. And I want them immediately; I should like to come in to-night if I could."

Mrs. Rivers showed him her two unoccupied rooms, and he declared himself quite satisfied with them; but the rent, he said, was beyond his means.

"Not that they are too high," he added; "for they are so nicely furnished that I am sure they are quite worth it, but they are too high for me. I must try somewhere else."

"Could you wait until evening, Mr. Godfrey, before looking elsewhere? I don't like to settle anything without my husband's advice, but I am quite sure that he will agree with me that we had better let you have the rooms for what you offer than keep them empty. It is a bad time of the year to let lodgings, and you will most likely be a permanent tenant."

"Yes; but, you see, I must find a lodging before night, for my present landlady has let the rooms I am leaving."

"Well, sir, Frank will be home before five, and he will be going to evening service, so if you are to be there, that will not be too late, will it? For I am quite certain he will be satisfied."

"That will do very well indeed, thank you. By the way, Mr. Rivers sometimes has a tall intelligent-looking lad with him; is he one of your family?"

"Our son Harry. He is studying under Mr. Eastwood, the artist, and they say he is very clever."

"Oh, I know Eastwood very well indeed. Is your son the pupil he is always talking of? He thinks very highly of him. I hope he and I may be good friends, I like his appearance so much. He has a good, honest, intelligent face."

After a few more words, Mr. Godfrey went away, and Mrs. Rivers proceeded to get her rooms ready for their new tenant.

Harry and his father came home at about the same time, and heard of Mr. Godfrey's visit, and her agreement with him.

"You were quite right, Mary. He will be a quiet, pleasant lodger, and we should be very foolish not to take him in. I shall see him after service; can you come with me, Mary?"

"I am afraid I cannot; but Harry can. I got very little work done to-day, and there is a dress promised early to-morrow."

"Can you come, Harry? Come along, then, for it is too hot to walk fast, so we had better go at once. We shall have time for a walk afterwards, if you care to come."

"Indeed I do; and so does May. I may as well bring her with me. If she gets tired I can carry her a bit."

"Bring her by all means; but she is getting too much of a young woman to be carried now — eh, Mayblossom?"

"That's not my name now, papa. Dame Trot is my new name. Harry has made a picture of me, with a peaky hat, and shoes

with such high heels and big buckles, and he calls it Dame Trot. So I shall trot upon my own feet, shan't I, Harry?"

"Certainly, Dame Trot, if you prefer it. Let me see to your hat, dear. Mamma, do come! Never mind that tiresome dress, but come with us."

"I wish I could. I really think I might manage to go to church with you, if you will promise not to mind me afterwards, but to go for your walk."

"We promise," said Frank, smiling. "Come at once, or we shall be too late."

"They were soon on their way to the church, whose sweet-toned bell was giving notice of the evening service. Frank went to his place in the choir, and his wife and son listened for his voice in the singing. It happened that there were but few of the choir present that evening, and when the hymn was sung, it seemed to those two as if the voice they loved were singing it alone. It was that beautiful hymn, "Lead, Kindly Light," and as the words, and the conversa-

tion about them with his father, were impressed very strongly upon Harry Rivers by circumstances which followed that quiet church-going, I shall give it here in full, in case my readers may not be acquainted with it: —

“Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom

Lead Thou me on ;

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on.

Keep Thou my feet ; I do not ask to see

The distant scene ; one step enough for me.

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou

Shouldst lead me on ;

I loved to choose and see my path ; but now

Lead Thou me on.

I loved the garish day, and, spite of fears,

Pride ruled my will : remember not past years.

So long Thy power hath blest me, sure it still

Will lead me on —

O'er moor and fen, o'er crag and torrent, till

The night is gone,

And with the morn those angel faces smile

Which I have loved long since, and lost awhile.”

Harry listened, his whole soul filled with the beauty of the music ; but the words

seemed to him strange and unnatural. He looked into his father's face, and thought, "In what perfect harmony his feelings and the words he is singing seem to be." Then he glanced at his mother; her quiet, earnest countenance seemed a reflection of her husband's.

"They understand it," thought Harry, "but I don't. I cannot understand any one's feeling like that. 'One step enough for me'—not to 'ask to see my future path!' oh no, I like to see it; to think of the time when I shall be a well-known artist, like Mr. Eastwood, earning money enough to keep my mother in her proper place, and to give May all she can wish for. Should I work so hard if I did not see so plainly before me the reward of my work?—fame, perhaps; the opportunity of seeing all the wonders of art—Rome, Florence. Oh no, I could not get along without 'seeing my path' at all."

He was so absorbed in these and similar thoughts, that the service was over and his

mother gone, and still he sat there thinking, with May beside him, wondering to see him so abstracted. Presently his father came and touched him on the arm ; Harry started up and they left the church together.

"Don't you want to see Mr. Godfrey, father?"

"I have seen him in the vestry-room."

"I think Harry was asleep," said May, laughing, "only his eyes were open."

"Were you asleep, Harry?"

"No, Dame Trot, only thinking."

The streets were crowded and noisy, so that further conversation was impossible just then; but soon they entered one of the parks, and having found a quiet spot with a vacant seat in it, Harry and his father sat down to rest, letting May run about to amuse herself.

"What were you thinking of in church this evening, Harry? You were so absorbed that I could not help observing it."

"I was thinking of the hymn."

"The one we were singing? Well, it is a beautiful hymn; don't you think so?"

“ Yes, certainly beautiful — but — ”

“ But what? Go on, my boy. We are both so busy, Harry, that we see less of each other than I could wish, but it would be a bitter grief to me if I thought that you had any difficulties — any thoughts, which you would not speak of to me. And you frowned so this evening that I felt sure something was puzzling you.”

“ Well, yes, father! I was puzzled by that hymn. Do you know it off by heart? ”

“ No, but I have the book here.”

Mr. Rivers opened the hymn-book and put it into his son's hands.

“ There it is. Now, my son, what is the puzzle? ”

“ Why, *all* of it, father. Is it possible, is it good, that any one should feel like this? You sang it as if you felt it, and mamma looked as if she understood it too. But I don't feel like that at all; and it seems impossible that I ever should.”

“ I dare say it does. You are young yet, Harry, and untried; this is the expression of

the feelings of one who has been tried, who has suffered, and learning that suffering is sent to teach us."

"But tell me, father, do you really feel like that?—as if 'one step' is enough to see, and that you are quite content to take your life as it comes, without thinking or planning for the future?—for that is what it all means, if I understand it rightly. Why, I am always planning for the future! You know how hard I work. Do you think I could go on with it if I did not look forward to the time when you will all be proud of me? when, perhaps, I shall be a rich man, able to make you all happy?"

Frank Rivers sighed slightly.

"Yes," said he, "I had plans and hopes like these too, long ago."

"And were they wrong? that's what I want to know."

"Well, I'm not very good at talking, Harry; some of these days we'll get Mr Godfrey to answer that question better than I can. But suppose now, that instead of

work that you like, and that holds out a prospect of fame and wealth, you were tied to work that you could not like, that was quite unlike anything you were brought up to; what would you do then?"

Harry pondered the question for a while. "I don't know," he said; "I never thought of it. Why do you ask me?"

"Because I want to show you that though your conduct is so good — for I know it is good, Harry, and that you work hard — your motives, by your own account of them, are not what they ought to be."

"Is it wrong, then," said Harry, very warmly, "to wish to get on in the world — to wish to raise myself and those I love? Is it wrong to work hard, to make the most of powers that God has given me? Surely, father, you don't mean that this is wrong?"

"No, I do not indeed; far from it."

"Then what *do* you mean? I don't understand at all."

"You have not answered my question yet, you know. Suppose, as I said before that

circumstances should compel you into some way of life that you did not like, and in which you were not cheered by the hope of rising to wealth and honor, what would you do?"

"But why should I imagine such a thing?" asked Harry, half laughing.

"The world is full of changes as great as that; but my motive in putting this question is only to show you that the motives you tell me you are guided by are not the best motives. They are useful only when your duty and your inclination run on the same rails. Now that proves that they are not the best motives—not the highest, and the highest are the only true ones that will help you to do right when it is unpleasant."

"And these highest motives, father—what are they?"

"You know them, Harry; you learned them at your mother's knee long ago."

"But I have forgotten," said Harry slowly. "I thought I was doing my duty, and that you were satisfied with me."

“And so I am, my dear boy. Neither I nor any one else has any fault to find with your conduct. But I don't want your goodness to be what I call fair-weather goodness; so I want you to look into your own heart, remembering that ‘the heart is deceitful above all things,’ and if we don't examine it some day we shall find that we know nothing of what is in it at all. You know whose example you are to follow, Harry. Don't, in all your hurry of work and interest, forget the simple, true lessons your dear mother taught you when you were a little fellow, no bigger than May is now. Rise as high as you may, don't forget that the highest life is the life that is most Christ-like; that the meanest duty done for his sake — because it is the work he puts into our hands, to be done for him — is the highest work; that the work most admired by the world, if done simply to please ourselves, is not duty, ‘splendid sin,’ as some writer says. And then, if ever the time comes to you, as it does to most people, that your duty and

your inclination pull different ways, this motive, and this only, will give you strength to stick to your duty, and let inclination go."

"It seems impossible," Harry said, in a low voice.

"What seems impossible, my son?"

"What you spoke of — following His example — living a Christ-like life. Father, don't be shocked! what I say sounds worse than it is; I am not used to talking about such things, and cannot make my meaning plain."

"I can quite understand that. I have such a horror of getting into a way of *talking* religion, it seems to me as if our best and holiest feelings begin to seem unreal if we discuss them much, and perhaps I have gone too far the other way, and not talked enough to you, my dear boy. But as we have such a quiet opportunity now, let us have a good talk while we are about it; and don't be afraid of shocking me. I once stood where you stand now, and I don't forget it. Be frank with

your father, Harry — who knows but I may be able to help you ? ”

“ I am sure you could, if I could say all I feel — but that seems impossible — the right words won't come. One thing is — you said just now we were to follow Christ's example. Now, he was God. He could do as he liked.”

“ But did he ? ” said Mr. Rivers, earnestly. “ Did he do as he liked ? did he live to please himself ? — or did he, who only of the race of man had the power to choose the rank in life, the way in life to which he should be born, — did he choose a pleasant, easy life, and an honorable place in the world ? No ; he was born among a conquered, subject people, and even among them he chose his lot among the poor and lowly. Why, Harry, if you think of it, his life was one long example of the very thing I've been saying to you. For did he not spend thirty years in doing such work as came in his way, so quietly and as a matter of course, that the very people he lived among seemed to have had no idea that he

was anything more than 'the carpenter's son'? And do you suppose that the work or the life was congenial to him?"

"No," said Harry, "I see that. Then, father, why did he do it? why did he choose to live like that? People would have thought a great deal more of him if he had come as a great king."

"But would they have loved him so well? Now, Harry, we have come to the heart of the matter. Listen well while I try, in my blundering way, to explain it. If he had come as a great king, how could he have been an example for struggling, hard-working people, such as I am, for instance? But he lived much such a life of toil, poverty and obscurity as I live; therefore I know that in such a life I may please God as he did; at least, I mean that if I fail to please God it is my own fault, not the fault of my condition in life. Then, too, when the weather is bad and I am overtired, and inclined to be down-hearted, I know that he knows what that feels like—he sat on

Jacob's well, being weary—he bore it all, and why? Because he loves us, because he would have us know that he loves us, that he knows and cares and is truly one of us, and one with us—our loving Elder Brother. Who that knows this grand truth, and believes it heartily, but must feel that work done for him is the highest work, as I said before, whether in itself pleasant or unpleasant? Think of all he did for the love of us, and do your work for the love of him.”

“I always thought we were to love him because he died for us, father; that's what mamma always said.”

— “Assuredly; but his death was but the crowning act of his life. In it there is no example for us; he died for our salvation, and we, as you don't need to be told, can save neither ourselves nor any one else; here we can only adore him with full hearts. But, for example, we must look to his life of patient, quiet self-denial and self-sacrifice; of meek obedience, ‘fulfilling all righteousness,’ ‘working the works of his Father

while it was day, because the night was coming when no man could work.' Oh, Harry! when the motive is love to Christ Jesus the Saviour, the meanest toil is sweetened, and the obscurest life ennobled. But you are quite right in putting his death first, for without it his example would have been of little use. As well might he tell a dead man to get up and walk without giving him life first, as to tell us to follow his example while we are dead in our sins."

"We live because he died?"

"And rose again; that is the complete truth. We die in his death, and are buried with him in baptism — so that in his resurrection we rise to a new life. And this new life we live in him and to him, not in our own strength, or to ourselves."

Harry sat silent thinking it over; and the father said no more, seeing that the boy was struck by what had passed. At last, raising his head suddenly, Harry said, "But the hymn, father; the hymn goes farther than this. I can understand what you have been

saying now, but not that hymn. Must I try to feel like that? For it does seem as if I never could."

"Leave that to time, my boy. No good is ever done by trying to force ourselves to feel what we don't really feel or understand. I don't mind promising you that you will understand this hymn better one of these days; time was when it would have puzzled me as much as it does you, and now — why, I feel as if it had been written for me."

"Do you *really*, father?"

"Really! I believe your mother has told you our story, has she not?"

"Oh, long ago; that time when I met my grandfather."

"You know, then, how hard I tried to find some opening which would give me a chance of keeping your dear mother as I hoped to keep her when I married her; but you don't know, and I trust and pray you never may, the feelings with which I saw hope after hope fail me, until I was forced to go into my present situation to ~~keep her~~

from actual want. How I rebelled at first ! No hope of rising, no scope for my abilities, no use for my education. Ah, Harry, I soon saw that I had been a proud rash fool, persuading your mother to disobey her father, and never doubting that I could do wonders for her. And see, now, how God has led me, step by step, until I learned what I really am ; punished me for my fault, yet in wrath remembered mercy ; for, in spite of poverty and hard work, we have been very happy together, my poor Mary and I. Do you wonder now that I should be content simply to do the day's work, not looking beyond ? Mine is a hazardous calling, you know, If I were to keep thinking what would become of Mary and you children if I were killed, as so many of us railway servants are, I should be a very miserable man. But 'one step,' you see, is always clear ; and God sees it all. Come, Harry, it is later than I thought, and there is going to be a shower, I am afraid. Find May, and let us be going."

Father and son had been so occupied in their conversation that they had not observed the threatening aspect of the sky : a sudden cloud had come up, with lurid edges, and summer lightning played against its dark curtain. May came running back to them at Harry's call, and they set off towards home at a good pace, May running between them, holding a hand of each. Presently down came the rain — great heavy drops, coming down straight from the black cloud ; then a clap of thunder was heard, and May got a little frightened.

"I wish we were at home," she said ; "I don't like the thunder, papa."

"Well, pet, we are pretty near home now ; we have walked well. Your nice little boots, Dame Trot, are getting sadly splashed ; but we can't help that, can we ? I wish we had brought an umbrella ; but who would have thought it would rain so soon ?"

Harry took no part in trying to amuse his little sister's thoughts ; he was too full of what his father had been saying to him

Poor fellow, he was destined to remember that conversation as long as he lived, and that walk through the splashing rain, and the streets crowded with people who had been surprised like themselves, and were hurrying home. They reached the crowded crossing which led to their home.

“Go first, Harry; it is very slippery, and I will carry May across.”

As he spoke, Frank Rivers lifted his little girl in his strong arms, and Harry ran on before him. Harry had reached, or almost reached, the other side, when there was a sudden rush of people—a cry of “Out of the way there!”—“Stop that horse!” Then came a scream, which rose distinct and shrill above the uproar. Harry looked round; a horse and carriage were dashing off at speed, men running hither and thither, women standing terrified, and his father and May were lying on the wet ground. Frank Rivers lay upon the stones of the crossing, May a little way off. She had not ceased screaming since she fell, but her father had never moved.

Harry rushed to his side ; the crowd closed round them, and there was no lack of kind and ready help. A workman, throwing down his tools, raised poor Frank's head, but a glance showed him, and, indeed, all present, except his young son, that no help could avail him.

Harry seemed quite stunned. " Who did it ? who did it ? " he kept saying, wildly. A gentleman who had just pushed his way through the crowd laid his hand upon the boy's shoulder and said,

" I am afraid I did it. My horse took fright at the lightning and ran away, and this poor fellow had something in his arms, and did not see how near we were. Who is he ? "

" It is my father. Oh, sir, send for a doctor ; perhaps he is not badly hurt. "

" I am a doctor myself. Where do you live ? The people are pressing on me so that I can see nothing. "

" Close by ; No 10, Upper Castle Street. "

The physician had knelt down beside Harry and looked at his father ; now he stood

up, and said gently and gravely, "Go you to the child, my boy; I will see your father carried home."

Poor Harry was still so stupefied that he obeyed without a word, and went into the shop into which May had been carried. There he found that the person who had lifted her up, and was taking care of her, was their lodger, Mr. Godfrey. He had been at the door of their house, getting his trunks carried in, when, seeing that an accident had happened, he ran to give what help he could, and, to his great sorrow, recognized little May.

"She has ceased screaming," he said to Harry, "and I cannot find that any bones are broken, so I hope she is not much hurt. My dear boy, you ought to go and warn your mother."

"I know I ought, but I am stupid, I think; it was so sudden. Is this Mr. Godfrey? Oh, sir, come with me; I don't know how I am to tell my mother."

"Surely I will go with you; come at once, there is no time to lose."

They ran all the way ; the door was open, and Sally, the little servant, was keeping one or two strangers from going up-stairs. " No one shall go frightening my missus until Master Harry comes himself," cried Sally ; " ah, here he is. Oh, Master Harry, what has happened ? "

But Harry could not answer. He led his companion up-stairs, and into the room where his mother was waiting for them ; she had heard a noise down-stairs, but thought it was only the men carrying in Mr. Godfrey's trunks.

But when she saw Harry's face, no words were needed to make her aware that some terrible misfortune had occurred. Harry looked at her, and whispered, " Mother, Mr. Godfrey will tell you ; I can't, "

And he ran out of the room and down-stairs not knowing whither he went.

They were carrying his father into the house as he came down ; the light from the hall lamp fell upon his face, and Harry knew that he was dead. He caught the doctor's

hand, and looked up into his face without a word.

"Where can we lay him down?" asked the physician, turning away sadly from the appealing look.

Harry led the way to the bedroom on the first floor, and the men laid their burthen down upon the bed, and stole quietly away. Dr. Eustace had before this ascertained that nothing could be done, but now, seeing poor Harry standing there, gazing blankly on his father's face, he once more felt the pulse and laid his hand upon the heart. Then he turned to Harry, — "My poor fellow, you see there is nothing for me to do here. Where is the child? I may be of some use to her."

"My father is dead, then?" said Harry, in a low voice.

The doctor answered gently, "He is dead; he was killed on the spot."

"Are you quite sure, sir?"

"Perfectly sure; put your hand here, over his heart, and you will doubt no longer."

Harry obeyed ; but press his trembling hand upon that once loving heart as he might, there was no answering thrill of life, and upon the clearly cut features there was now a solemn calm, which told even Harry's inexperienced eyes that life was gone.

"You know it now?" said Dr. Eustace, as the boy desisted from his vain efforts.

"I knew it before, only I tried not to believe it."

He stood silent for a moment, and then said, simply, "My mother, my poor mother!"

"Let us go to her," said Dr. Eustace, "and see about the child."

They went up-stairs; May had been brought home, and was lying on the little sofa: the room was full of strangers, with sympathizing faces, watching Mrs. Rivers as she stood beside the child, silent and apparently calm. Dr. Eustace and Mr. Godfrey sent them all away, and when the room was cleared Mr. Godfrey said, in a low voice,

"I have told her; but I do not know that she understood me."

Mary Rivers looked round, showing a white, scared face, and said,

“I understood you, Mr. Godfrey. You told me that Frank is dead.”

“I don't like this,” whispered Dr. Eustace ; “she is too calm and quiet — stunned, poor thing. But the child looks bad, I must see to her.”

As he spoke he began with skilful touch to remove May's frock, and Mrs. Rivers came and helped him. He was busied about the child for some time, and she still helped without a word. Presently he stepped back to Harry and said to him,

“If this goes on, your mother will be ill ; speak to her, make her listen to you,—if possible, make her cry, it may save her life.”

Harry started, came forward, and took his mother's hand in his. He led her out of the room, she following him passively like a person walking in sleep. Harry looked into her wide open, quiet eyes, and was more frightened than if she had shown the most

violent grief; but terror gave him wisdom to know what was the best thing to do: he led her down-stairs and into the room where his father lay. When she saw her dear Frank lying there pale and still, with the brown curly hair, that she was so proud of, all wet and mud-stained, her unnatural composure gave way; she sank upon her knees beside the bed, crying out piteously,

“Oh, my Frank! my darling, my darling!”

And then tears came. Harry wept too, poor fellow, and knelt beside her; the two poor things clung to each other and sobbed. It was a long time before Mrs. Rivers was again calm enough to speak, and then Dr. Eustace explained to her how it happened; he told her that her husband had been killed instantaneously, suffering no pain.

“I can thank God for that,” she said, “because no death could be sudden to him; he was always ready, trusting in his Saviour.”

Harry thought of his father's words that evening — only that evening — not two hours ago, and it seemed so long ago! “Do you

wonder that I am content to do the day's work, not looking beyond it? that 'one step is enough' for me?"

Now his day's work was done; the "one step" he did not ask to see had been from this scene of trial and toil into the brightness of his Father's home and the presence of the Elder Brother, whose footsteps he had so humbly and faithfully endeavored to follow. He heard his mother murmur, "Gone home — gone home first, Frank." Not one repining word passed her lips; she knew it was no chance, no accident, but as surely the loving call of Christ as if she had heard his voice saying, "It is I; be not afraid."

Presently Harry heard her ask, "Is my little girl much hurt, Dr. Eustace?"

"Oh, there are no bones broken," he answered, but not very cheerfully. "I'm afraid she has some suffering before her; however, I shall be a better judge to-morrow. Don't send for any other doctor, Mrs. Rivers; I will attend your little girl very carefully. I am more shocked than I can say to have been

the cause of so much sorrow, though, believe me, I was not driving carelessly."

Then he said "Good-bye," and went away. Mr. Godfrey, who would not leave them alone in their sorrow, kept watch with them all that dreary night, while they sat by poor little May's uneasy pillow, and mourned sore for the husband and father who had been so suddenly taken from them. He afterwards said that he learnt what real submission to God's will meant from Mary Rivers during that long night-watch.



CHAPTER III.

A HARD STRUGGLE.

WHEN Mary Rivers had sufficiently recovered from the terrible shock of her husband's death to be able to turn her thoughts to the future, she held a consultation with her two friends, Mr. Godfrey, whom she never could look upon as a stranger since that awful night when he had been like a brother to her, and Mr. Eastwood, who was very anxious to know what effect his father's death would have upon Harry's prospects.

She told them that she was most desirous that Harry should continue his studies, as had been intended. She hoped that by en-

gaging one or two girls to assist in her work she could so increase her dressmaking business, that with the help of her lodgers' payments she could pay the rent of her house and support herself and May, and help to support Harry; but she thought that perhaps Mr. Eastwood could put his pupil in the way of partly supporting himself.

"That I surely can, Mrs. Rivers," said Paul Eastwood, much relieved to find that he was not to lose his pupil. "Harry draws so well now that I am sure he can undertake to illustrate cheap works and periodicals. He won't earn much, for I cannot allow him to give much time to it; it would be a thousand pities to interrupt his regular studies just now."

"I don't want him to do much," said Mrs. Rivers, "nor should I allow him to be delayed even a little in his studies if I could help it. But my health is so uncertain, and my poor little May requires so much care, that I am afraid Harry must do something for himself."

"Perhaps," said Harry, slowly, "I had better try to get work that would support me altogether."

"Now, Mrs. Rivers," cried the artist, eagerly, "don't allow that. I assure you it would be an actual sin. If Harry works on steadily for three or four years more, with a year in Rome, which I mean to manage for him, he will be an independent man, able to repay a hundredfold all that you have done for him. And it would be cruel — wicked, to ask him to throw away such talents as his."

"Still," began Mr. Godfrey, "Harry must be guided by his own sense of right."

"No, no!" broke in Mary Rivers hastily. "Harry must obey me; he always has hitherto, and I am sure he will now. It was his father's wish that he should continue his studies and be an artist, and I shall not allow any change to be made."

So the matter was arranged. Harry worked, if possible, harder than ever, in order to earn money without interrupting

his studies; but his earnings were very small. Mrs. Rivers toiled unceasingly, but it became a hand-to-hand struggle with poverty. May took up so much of her time, too; the poor child had received some terrible injury to her spine, and Dr. Eustace gave them but little hope that she would ever be better. She had never been able to stand or walk since that dreadful night: her pet name, "Dame Trot," was never heard now, for her little pattering feet that had earned it were quiet enough.

The months went by; all Mary's little savings were spent by degrees to eke out her earnings. May was no better, and her mother's gentle face grew sadly pinched and careworn. Mr. Godfrey (who still occupied her first floor, and was very kind to them all) once or twice tried to speak to Harry on the subject of his mother's anxiety, but he found to his sorrow that the lad, once so frank and gentle, listened to him in dogged silence, and would not answer. He was exceedingly grieved at this; for he had become

much attached to Harry, and did not understand this change in his manner. During the first year after his father's death the boy was very much with his new friend, and Mr. Godfrey had learned to love him.

Once, when Frank Rivers had been nearly two years dead, Mr. Godfrey happened to meet Mr. Eastwood, and his mind being full of Harry's changed looks, he said to him, "How is Harry getting on now, Eastwood? Is he doing well?"

Paul Eastwood looked vexed.

"He would do better," said he, "if you would leave off putting foolish ideas into his head. Now, just ask yourself the plain question—What can he do towards supporting his mother and sister? Suppose he left me this very day, and went in search of better paid work, do you suppose he would get it? You know better. There are hundreds of young men trying to get work and failing. And by simply persevering for a few years longer, Harry will be able to do what he likes."

“What makes you think that I put foolish ideas into his head?” inquired Mr. Godfrey, quietly.

“Oh, I know you have spoken to him once or twice, and I have had hard work to quiet him again. You are really doing him an injury, you know. The first year after his father's death he got on splendidly, but latterly—I can't account for it except by supposing that your words are weighing on his mind—he does not get on at all, though he seems to work harder than ever. Several of his illustrations have been refused, and his work in the studio is not what it used to be.”

“I am very sorry to hear this,” replied Mr. Godfrey, “but I assure you it would not be right not to call his attention to his mother's state; she will certainly break down under her struggle. I am a poor man, as you know, and with all the will, I have not the power to help her. The poor little girl, too, she suffers terribly, and lies there for hours alone; a patient,

good little May she is; you never hear a complaint from her."

"But what can Harry do?" said Mr. Eastwood. "I would help if I could, but have never saved; it all goes as it comes, and Owen's education is costing me so much. But if you are wanting Harry to give up his profession, I suppose you know of some opening that will make him independent sooner than it would?"

"No; I do not," answered the minister. "But I should think work might be found. He is seventeen, well educated, and —"

"Well, now, Godfrey, I have only one word to say. You are not doing him any good by unsettling his mind and making him unhappy. You keep him back in his profession, and yet you are obliged to confess that you don't know what else he could do."

"No; but in his place I should try to find out. However, you need not be afraid that I shall interfere, for Harry is not so frank with me as he used to be; indeed, latterly I hardly see him."

"So much the better," said Paul Eastwood, laughing. "You just leave him to me, and you'll see him a great man one of these days!"

And the artist hurried away, not caring to hear what his friend might say in reply to this remark.

Poor Harry! he was indeed so unhappy at this time that it was no wonder that his beloved studies did not flourish. His conscience was ill at ease, and, try as he might, he could not succeed in stifling the pain. It did not need that Mr. Godfrey should point out to him his duty; he knew it too well for his own comfort. Nay, he knew something that Mr. Godfrey did not know, which made his path even plainer before him. For when he recalled, as he did frequently, in spite of himself, that interview with his grandfather, and the old man's voluntary promise of assistance should he ever remind him of the service then rendered him, Harry could not blind himself to the fact that until he had asked him for employment and been refused,

he had not the smallest excuse for taking comfort in Mr. Eastwood's assertions that to procure employment that would pay was impossible.

Yet, to give up all his bright hopes! all his proud future of fame and wealth! to tie himself to the dull plodding work of a counting-house; to offend, perhaps, his kind friend and teacher; never to see Rome and the treasures of art of which he had so long dreamed. No, he *could* not do it; it was impossible that such a sacrifice could be required of him. As Mr. Eastwood said, "In a few years you will be able to support half-a-dozen mothers and sisters." In a few years! Yes, but as often as Harry arrived at this point in the silent argument between himself and that "still small voice" that would not hush, the terrible idea that in a few years he might have neither mother nor sister to support would present itself. He could not but see that May was fading day by day, needing fresh air, better food, and better nursing than could be procured for

her. His mother, too, looked over-worked and heart-broken.

These thoughts kept gnawing at his heart; what wonder that his hand was no longer steady, nor his eye true?

The remembrance of his father, too, that used to spur him on to greater diligence, was now bitter to him. What would that wise and loving father say to him, could they meet now? Harry knew well enough what he would say; the memory of that last conversation haunted him perpetually. Was he not called now, and that in no uncertain voice, to a duty that was distasteful to him; and had not his father been right in asserting that the motives he was guided by were not the ones to lead him to follow duty when it went against inclination? The example of Christ, too, of which his father had spoken, was not forgotten. For though Harry had not altogether yielded his heart to the loving control of his Saviour, yet his conscience was active, and the Holy Spirit was pleading with him day by day, leading him towards a

higher life of full consecration and simple faith in Christ. There were times when these thoughts became so masterful that Harry flung down brush and palette, and hurried out of Mr. Eastwood's studio, half determined to see his grandfather at once, and appeal to him to keep his promise ; but then the remembrance of all he must give up came back, and he could not do it.

But Harry Rivers was the "son of many prayers," like St. Augustine of old, and he was not deserted, or allowed to silence his conscience and be at peace. As time went on he became more and more unhappy, and grew so thin and pale, that his mother was quite alarmed for his health.

One hot day in July, when May had passed a restless night, and, wearied out, was sleeping on her little couch in the sitting-room, Harry came in, and stood looking at her with such a troubled face that his mother left her work to come and lay her hand upon his arm, and whisper gently,

"Are you ill, dear Harry? I cannot bear to see you like this."

Harry had become so silent and moody, so unlike her bright, pleasant boy, that she asked the question timidly. Not that he had ever been rough to her, but that she felt that she did not understand him.

“I am not ill, mother.”

“Then what is it, Harry? My darling, there is something wrong with you—I have seen it this long time. Will you not tell me what it is? You used to share every feeling with me; now you shut me out; and yet I see that you are unhappy.”

“Yes, unhappy, miserable!” said Harry, with a smothered sob. “And I deserve to be so. I am a selfish, cowardly wretch, and I know it! How can I be happy?”

“My dear boy, you frighten me. What do you mean?”

“Do not ask me just now, mamma. There is a great battle going on in my heart, and you cannot help me in it. It must soon come to an end; I cannot bear it much longer.”

Mary looked at his gloomy face; she did

not choose to force him to confide in her, and yet it grieved her to the heart that he should suffer, and she not be able to help him.

"A battle," she said, "and I can do nothing! Yes, Harry, there is one thing I can do, and will; I shall pray that you may be guided right."

"Do, mother! I need guidance; no, I will not say what is not true. Mother, I know what I ought to do well enough, but I have no heart to do it."

"Then I will pray that you may have strength given you. Oh, Harry!" she exclaimed, tears coming into her eyes, "you must not turn quite away from me, though I am not wise to advise you, as your dear father was."

"My father! Ah, mother! I have no doubt what he would say to me. Don't cry, my own dear mammie! I will tell you soon, but it is better I should not tell you now. I think I shall soon make up my mind now; don't forget what you said you would do for me."

Mary kissed him, and went away, She went quietly to her own room, and shut herself in for awhile. Harry knew how she was employed. He covered his face with his hands, and sat there, fighting his battle once more. It was a sore struggle ; much sorer than ordinary people can understand.

For we must remember that those to whom God has given even a small measure of the wondrous gift that we call genius, not only feel things with more than ordinary acuteness, but to them the power of following the bent of their peculiar talent is almost necessary, quite necessary, indeed, to their happiness. So, in judging Harry Rivers for his hesitation, it must be borne in mind that the sacrifice required of him was no ordinary one. It was not merely changing one mode of life which he liked for another which he might not like so well ; it was much more like giving up his life altogether. If he were not an artist, it seemed to him little matter, as far as he was concerned, what he was or what work he had to do.

There he sat, outwardly so quiet that he did not disturb May's light slumbers, but in his heart raged a battle on which God's angels may have looked with solemn interest. For it was a turning-point in his life. Two paths lie before him ; which will he follow ? One, dark and difficult, leads by the cross to the crown ; the other, bright and easy, leads — whither ?

May moved uneasily in her sleep, and Harry went and stood beside her ; she was smiling, he saw, and a pink flush came into her cheeks, so that she looked like his little Mayblossom again. But in a moment more she woke with a start, looked hastily round, and believing herself alone — for he was a little behind the couch — put her hands over her eyes, and burst into a little weary, woeful cry, that went to his heart.

“ May ! my little May ! you must not do this. What is it, darling ? ”

“ Oh, Harry ! are you there ? I was only dreaming.”

“ And what did my poor little May dream

about, that made her smile first and then cry?" asked Harry, fondly, drawing her hands away from her face.

"Never mind, dear; it's only nonsense," she replied, trying to smile, though the great tears were running down her cheeks. "Can you stay with me, and make some pictures, Harry? I do like that so much. Make me some new ones, and tell me a story about them, and then when I am alone they will be as good as a new book to me."

"But first tell me why you cried. I must know that, May."

May blushed a little.

"It was very silly of me," she said. "It was only because I found it was only a dream. But I would rather not talk about it, indeed. Mr. Godfrey says we must try to be content, and I know talking about it will only make me long the more for it."

"Heaven knows, *you* don't grumble, May. I often wonder how you bear so much without a word of complaint."

"You don't see my heart. I *do* grumble sometimes, though I try not. But, oh, Harry! when Mr. Godfrey talks to me about heaven, and all that our dear Lord bore that we might go there, it seems such a shame to think so much of a little pain, or even this want of breath, which is worse than any pain, I think."

"But, May, tell me all about the dream that made you cry."

"Ah, that dream! it comes so often. I dreamt that I was lying here, looking up at the ceiling, which seemed heavy, as if it somehow kept me from breathing. And the room was very hot—it is, you know, when the sun is on the windows. But while I looked, the ceiling began to go up—and up—and it went higher and higher, till it melted all away into the clear blue sky. Oh, so clear and so blue, and so high up away from me; and one pretty little white cloud sailing about over my head. Then I heard a murmur, like the sound in the great shell Owen Eastwood gave me,

only ever so much louder ; and the air was cool and blew upon my face and stirred my hair softly ; and I breathed without pain or trouble, and was able to sit up and look round ; then I saw that I lay on the sea-shore, on my bed, you know, but it stood on the sand beside the sea. Oh, so lovely ! just for one moment. But I cannot describe it, for I always awake then."

Her voice, which had been so eager while telling of her beautiful dream, broke down suddenly, and May cried again — she could not help it. Harry kissed her, but said nothing.

"And oh, Harry! the worst of it is, I cannot get this dream out of my head. I am always thinking of it, and longing for it to turn into real earnest. I long to breathe that cool fresh breeze and see that blue sky and beautiful sea, and I get no rest because of this foolish longing."

"Do you think it would make you well, May?"

"No. I shall never be well ; I know Dr.

Eustace thinks so. But the breeze! oh, it would be so cool and pleasant."

"Have you told mamma of this dream, darling?"

"Yes, but she cried; and so I have never spoken of it again. Don't say anything to her of it, Harry. I know it is quite impossible, and, indeed, I know it is wrong to think of it."

"Not wrong, my poor little May — very natural."

"But that doesn't make it right, you know."

"Well, but I mean that I don't see how you can help it, dear."

"Oh yes I can, sometimes; and I ought always."

"How, May? — tell me."

"Oh, you know, Harry, better than I do," the child answered, with a bright smile. "I think of Him — the Lord Jesus. All he bore for us; and now he sends me this to bear for him. When I remember this it seems easy to be patient, but then I am foolish and for-

get sometimes. But Mr. Godfrey says that if I pray very often for help, he will certainly make me able to remember always."

Back into Harry's mind flashed the remembrance of his father's earnest face on that last evening, lighted as it had been with loving faith ; May's pale little face bore the same look now. He sat silent, thinking of that evening's talk — and as he thought, light dawned. This was the work given ; not pleasant, not what he would have chosen for himself, but a plain call of duty, to which he could no longer shut his ears. Now, then, the question was, what was his ruling motive ? Was it love for Him who sent the trial, or simply love of self ? For a moment he felt terribly weak and helpless, but in this struggle he lifted up his heart for help. "Thou who didst die for me, help me to live to thee. Help me *now*, for I am weak and selfish. Thou hast showed me thy will ! help me now to *do* it."

"What are you saying, Harry ? I don't quite hear you."

"I did not speak, dear ; I was thinking of something," Harry answered, taking up her little Bible as he spoke.

"Now I will read you a chapter, May ; for I must go out."

"Must you ?" cried May, rather disappointed. "I thought perhaps you had a holiday."

"No. I have some work to do, and I must do it at once," he answered, gravely.

He opened the Bible at the place where her marker lay, and read. His mind was full, and the words had no sense in them for him at first, But these verses roused him :

"If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee.

"If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee."

"God helping me, I will," said Harry, half aloud. May started and asked,

"What do you say ?"

"Nothing, dear, Good-bye for a while."

He went over to his old cupboard, and after a short search found his grandfather's

card, rather yellow and dirty, but safe enough. Then he went in search of his mother.

“Mamma, do you know how May is longing to be by the seaside?”

“Yes; but what can we do? I should lose all my employers if I left London; and how could I send her alone — even if I could afford it, which I cannot? I can barely pay my way.”

“But how much, or rather how little, could you and she live upon somewhere by the seaside?”

“Dear boy, what is the use of talking of that?”

“It does no harm, mother; please tell me. How much must I earn to give May her wish?”

Mrs. Rivers sighed, for she was well aware that Harry's earnings as an artist would come too late for May.

“Eighty pounds a year, or even a little less. But indeed, dear, I might as well say five hundred, the one is as possible as the other.”

Harry lingered yet one moment to ask in a low voice, "Would she get well if she had her wish, do you think?"

"No, dear Harry, she would no doubt suffer less; but we shall never see her well again. My pretty May," she went on sadly; "it would be selfish to be sorry that her sufferings will not be for long."

"Does Dr. Eustace say that?"

"Yes."

Harry stood quite still for a moment, and then went quickly away; his mother heard the street-door shut in a moment more.

The battle was over; the victory won. Harry was going direct to his grandfather's place of business, and had determined, if that hope failed him, he would go to the manager of the Great Western station, and try if, for his father's sake, they would employ him.

It was only two o'clock; there was plenty of time before him. He strode along with a color in his cheek and a light in his eye which had long been absent; it was something gained to have made up his mind.



CHAPTER IV.

HARRY'S VICTORY.

IT was not the first time that Harry Rivers had walked to his grandfather's business house in the city, for during the unhappy times I have been speaking of he had gone there more than once, and had even looked into the long narrow room, fitted up with many desks and high stools, where the clerks worked for many hours each day. On former occasions he had turned away and gone back to his painting; but this time he went resolutely into the outer room, and said to a porter whom he met there, "Is Mr. Marshall here to-day?"

"Yes, he is here; but he is very busy?"

"I want to see him," said Harry.

"Have you an appointment with him?"

"Not exactly; but if you will take him this card, and say that the person to whom he gave it has called, I think he will see me."

The man took the soiled and yellow card and glanced at it; then after a moment's hesitation, he went into the counting-house, and showed it to Mr. Frere, the chief clerk.

"There is a young gentleman in the outer office, sir, wanting to see Mr. Marshall; he desired me to give him that card, and say that the person he had given it to was here. What had I better do?"

"Show me the card. Mr. Marshall's own card, I see. Well, Jennings, I will see him; it won't do to disturb Mr. Marshall if it can be helped."

"Thank you, sir," said Jennings, in a tone of relief.

Harry could hear all this as he stood in the outer office, and he smiled to himself as he thought, "What order the old gentleman has them in; they are all afraid of him."

Many people in his place would have been discouraged, but I think Harry had inherited a little of his grandfather's sturdy spirit, for he only felt more anxious to see him, and quite determined not to tell his business to any one else. Mr. Frere came out into the office, and said, civilly,

"Have you any business with Mr. Marshall? for this is his time for writing his letters, and his orders are that, except when necessary, he is not to be disturbed."

"I have business with him," replied Harry. "He gave me that card some time ago, and promised to see me whenever I called."

"What name shall I say?" inquired Mr. Frere.

"My name is of no consequence; I mean I would prefer not to give it."

"Could you not leave a message with me, or call again later?"

"No; I cannot wait. I shall not keep Mr. Marshall long, but I want to see him at once."

Mr. Frere looked at the card and then at

Harry. "The truth is," said he, "that Mr Marshall will be seriously annoyed if we disturb him without sufficient cause. If you will not give your name, or some idea of your business with him, I cannot allow Jennings to go to him."

Harry considered for a moment, then he said, "I do not wish my name mentioned to Mr. Marshall until I do so myself; but I think you will send in my message when you know who I am. My name is Rivers."

Mr. Frere glanced quickly at him. He was an old man, and remembered Frank Rivers well when he was a clerk in that very counting-house. Harry was very like his mother too; Mr. Frere saw that, now he looked more attentively at him.

"Jennings, here is the card; say only that a young gentleman wishes to see him on private business."

Mr. Frere went back to his desk, and Jennings passed out of Harry's sight through the long narrow room into the one beyond. Presently he came back.

“ Mr. Marshall will see you, sir.”

Mr. Marshall's private room was separated from the counting-house by a small ante-room, through which Harry went with a beating heart; then a green baize door swung open, and he was in the presence of his grandfather. The old man, who looked not a day older than when they last met, was sitting before a large writing table, and a pile of letters lay before him. He looked sharply at Harry, pointing to the card, which lay on the table.

“ When did I give you that? Some time ago, I suspect. I've forgotten all about it, and yet I remember your face, I think.”

“ It is five years since you gave me that card, Mr. Marshall. I had saved a pocket-book of yours which was stolen in Regent Street by a pickpocket, and you promised that if I ever applied to you for employment you would inquire about me, and assist me if you found that you approved of me.”

“ I thought I knew your face,” answered Mr. Marshall, in the well-remembered gruff voice.

But Harry observed that he kept looking at him as if something in his appearance were puzzling him.

"Yes, you're the boy. I remember it very well. You refused to take the reward I offered, and there were papers of value in the pocket-book. Well! what's your name, and what do you want me to do for you?"

"Sir, my father is dead; he was killed by an accident in the street two years ago. My little sister who was with him was injured in some way at the time; she has never had the use of her limbs since, and, we fear, never will. My mother has hitherto supported herself and my sister, and partly supported me, by dressmaking, but —"

"And what do you mean, a stout fellow like you, by living on your mother's earnings?" asked Mr. Marshall, sharply.

"It has been her own wish—indeed, it is without her knowledge that I am here to-day. I have been studying under Mr. Paul Eastwood, the artist; they say I have talent, and it was my father's wish—my mother

would bear anything rather than allow me to give up. But my sister is getting worse, requiring constant care, and my mother is breaking down under the burden. I want to earn enough to send them to the sea-side and support them there; the child pines day and night for fresh air. If you can put me in the way to do this, sir, you will be doing a kind action."

"Young man I never do kind actions. I make a rule of that. What fools call charity is a weakness to which I am not subject. But I am a perfectly just man, so far as I can see; and I owe you something. But your earnings cannot possibly support three people just yet."

"My mother said she could manage with eighty pounds a year, or even less; but there is my own support to be thought of too."

"A hundred and twenty pounds a year would barely do it. Now, if I put you into my counting-house, which is the very utmost I could do for you, my younger clerks get only ninety."

"Oh, sir!" Harry exclaimed, eagerly, "try me! please do. I could work after office hours at something else. I could manage on very little myself, I know."

"I must consider. What is your name? you have not told me that yet."

Harry colored, but answered boldly,

"I will only ask you to remember that I apply to you merely as the gentleman whose pocket-book I saved, and who seemed to think I had, for that reason a claim upon him. My name is Henry Marshall Rivers."

The old man started, turned away for a moment, then looked him in the face and said, in exactly the same quick tone,

"My grandson I presume?"

"Yes, Mr. Marshall."

Then there was a short silence, during which Harry's heart beat fast with anxiety. At last his grandfather looked up again and said very deliberately,

"Henry Marshall Rivers, I told you just now that I am a just man, and I mean to act justly by you. You are not to blame for

your parents' faults, and the fact that you are my grandson — which I don't doubt, for you are like your mother — certainly makes your claim upon me stronger than if you were a perfect stranger. I shall put you into my office as junior clerk — the place your father held. And I shall pay you one hundred and fifty pounds a year from the first, but you will remain at the same salary without any increase, such as my other clerks get, until you have worked out the additional payment I am making you now.

Moreover, you must distinctly understand that you are to expect nothing more from me. Your mother ceased to be my child when she ceased to obey me, and *I never* forgive. I give you a week from this day to make your arrangements, and I shall pay you a month's salary in advance."

He opened the drawer of his writing-table and took out the very brown pocket-book. Harry thought, which he had saved from the thief. From this he took twelve sovereigns and six shillings, which he pushed across the table to Harry.

"Now, Mr. Rivers, I hope you understand me. You are no more to me henceforth than any other clerk in my office."

"I understand, sir. I have no choice but to accept your offer, which, indeed, is more than I dared to expect, and I am not ungrateful, though —"

"Though what? speak out, boy."

"Though I wish you had not spoken as you did of my mother, sir. And I trust you believe me that she knows nothing of my coming here to-day," said Harry, firmly but respectfully.

Mr. Marshall looked keenly at him, and then said,

"You are right, boy. I beg your pardon; I ought not to have spoken as I did to you. As to gratitude, you owe me none. I owed you something, and have now paid it. The mere money you will repay me. Good-morning, Mr. Rivers; this day week at half-past nine, I shall tell Mr. Frere to expect you."

Harry bowed and left the room. When

he found himself again in the street his mind was so occupied with the scene that had just passed that he wandered along, not thinking whither he was going. Long custom made him bend his steps to Mr. Eastwood's neighborhood. Presently he roused himself.

"Where am I?" he thought. "Oh, well, I had better go on. It will be the worst of all — better get it done."

So he went to the artist's house. As usual, Paul Eastwood was hard at work, and his loud, cheery voice greeted him.

"Here you are at last, youngster. I was wondering what had become of you. I have news for you, Harry, that will make you open your eyes. I think you have been for some time not quite yourself — wanting a change — and —"

"And I'm going to have it," said Harry, making a somewhat feeble attempt to laugh. "Mr. Eastwood, don't be angry with me. I've made up my mind at last. I *must* work for my mother and sister — I must, indeed."

"Now, youngster, are to we have all that bothering old argument over again? When a fellow has such talents as you have, his clear duty is to make the most of them. We have talked it over a hundred times, and always come to that conclusion. There—I won't hear another word about it. By-and-by you'll have enough to support a dozen mothers and sisters, if you had 'em, as I've told you often enough. Let them have patience for that."

"Patience! Heaven knows they have patience enough. It is not their doing. Mr. Eastwood, May is dying—pining away for want of fresh air—and I *must* give her what I can't help hoping may save her life. You know what a struggle it must be to me—please don't make it harder by being angry with me. You have no idea how unhappy I have been."

The artist flung down brush and palette, turning a half-vexed, half-pitying look upon Harry.

"And do you really think, you foolish fel-

low, that you can possibly hope to earn what will keep your mother and sister, to say nothing of yourself?"

"I have been very fortunate. I have got a place at a hundred and fifty pounds a year."

"A hundred and fifty! The boy's raving."

"It is more than I have any real right to, I know, but I can easily explain it to you."

Mr. Eastwood took up his brush, and made a poor pretence of working while Harry told him the story of his mother's marriage, and his own adventure with his grandfather.

"And he'll give you a hundred and fifty pounds a year! mighty generosity! Why, Harry, in a few years you would be earning four times that sum. I *cannot* bear to think of your giving it up. It vexes me, boy — it really vexes me."

"It is more than a vexation to me," said Harry, sadly. "It is like giving up the sunshine and going to live in a dark cell. But

I dare not go on. Think of my mother slaving night and day, and May panting for every breath she draws, and dying before my eyes ; how can I hesitate any longer ? ”

Mr. Eastwood sighed.

“ It is an awful pity,” he said ; “ but I suppose you are right.”

“ Oh, thank you ! thank you a thousand times for those words ! Now that you say that I can be happy again.”

“ That’s more than I can then. I had such news for you this morning, too. I was frantic for you to come in and hear it. I’ve got a commission to copy one or two pictures in Rome for Lord ——, and I meant to have taken you with me. I shall be there more than a year probably. It would have been the making of you, Harry.”

“ Rome ! ” exclaimed Harry.

Yes, Rome — the dream of his life ; and it had been — nay, still was — in his power to go there. It was a bitter struggle, and Mr. Eastwood, watching his agitated face, half hoped that after all he might not lose his

pupil. But Harry was not trusting in his own strength, and therefore he was safe. With a deep breath, and in a very low voice, he said.

"I shall never forget your kindness, Mr. Eastwood — never ! Where will Owen live while you are away ?"

"Owen is going to a German college for a time, and then means to become an engineer. It's all *he's* fit for — poor Owen !"

"I shall be very lonely," said Harry. "Well, I must be going now. I shall come for my easel and things when I know where I shall lodge."

"Come as often as you can. Be off now, you young scamp ! you've spoiled my painting for this day. Don't look so pitiful, my boy," he added, kindly. "I know you're doing right ; but it goes to my heart to leave you."

Harry went home now. He felt very sad at first, but as he got nearer to Castle Street he dwelt upon May's delight, and that thought cheered him very much. The day

had passed away now, and in his agitation Harry had utterly forgotten his dinner ; nor did he even now remember it until his mother greeted him with,

“ Why, Harry, you never told me you were not coming home to dinner, and I kept some for you for ever so long.”

“ I declare I forgot all about dinner, mamma. What have you done with it? for now I think of it I am hungry.”

“ Do you mean to say that you have had *no* dinner ? ”

“ None at all.”

“ Nothing since breakfast, Harry? Why, you must be actually starving! I will get tea ready at once, and you must have some cold meat. What have you been doing ? ”

Even as she spoke it struck Mary Rivers that her boy looked more like himself than he had done of late. There was a quiet brightness in his face, and his voice had lost the half-sullen sound which had grieved her so much. Mr. Godfrey, who was sitting beside May's couch, reading to her, remarked

the change too. He rose now, and then Harry saw him for the first time, and though he blushed a little he seemed pleased.

“I’m glad you are here, Mr. Godfrey, for I know you will be glad to hear some news that I have for May. May, my darling, you are going to have your wish, and more than your wish ; you are going to the country — to the sea-side. And you shall have mamma sitting beside you all day long, with nothing to do but to make you happy.”

May looked at him with brightening eyes and cheeks.

“Oh, Harry! is it real? Shall I *really* go?”

“Oh, Harry!” exclaimed Mrs. Rivers. “What wild idea is this? Why do you raise hopes that can’t be realized?”

“Harry would not do that,” said May, with a look of perfect trust at her brother.

“Mother, do you think I’m such a brute? No; every word of it is true. I have got a place as a clerk in an office, and I am to have a hundred and fifty pounds a year.

You said eighty would do, and now you can have more."

Mrs. Rivers looked quite frightened.

"I don't understand you," she said. "It is more than you could get, Harry."

"Sit down, my dear, distrustful mother; do you think I have joined a gang of house-breakers, that you tremble so? No, indeed. I just went to my grandfather, sent in the card he gave me long ago—don't you remember, mamma, and how I wanted to burn it? Well, he saw me, and remembered all about the pocket-book, promised me a place in his office, and when he heard who I was said he would give me a hundred and fifty from the first. And there's my first month in advance—so now perhaps you will believe in it."

And he put the money into her hand; but Mrs. Rivers let it all fall upon the ground, while she threw her arms round Harry and burst into tears.

Oh, my darling! you have given up your bright prospects in life for this! You would have been a great artist, and now —"

"And now," interrupted Mr. Godfrey, coming to Harry's assistance, "And now, dear Mrs. Rivers, he will be a much greater thing than a great artist, though I know he must feel the sacrifice. It is no small one, Harry—I know that. But tell your mother, are you not happier now than you have been for a long time?"

"Mother, I have been miserable!" exclaimed Harry, earnestly. "I can't talk about it—don't ask me any questions, but just believe me. Mr. Godfrey is right. Let me do what I know I ought to do."

"But, Mr. Godfrey," said little May from her sofa, "is it selfish of me to let him do this?"

"Not at all, my dear, for you have no choice," answered Harry. "It is done, and I've told Mr. Eastwood. The matter is settled."

"And it won't be for long," said the child quietly.

"Now," said Mr. Godfrey, who was quietly employed in gathering up the money

Mrs. Rivers had dropped, "I hear Sally bringing up my dinner, and I shall run away with Harry, Mrs. Rivers, and make him eat something; for you are all so excited that among you he will be starved. How much ought there to be, Harry? Reckon it, and see if I have found it all."

"Oh, I forgot all about it. Yes, it is all here, thank you, Mr. Godfrey. Oh dear! I'm so hungry!"

"Come and dine with me, then; we will leave your mother and May to compose themselves with a cup of tea," said Mr. Godfrey, laughing, as he took Harry by the shoulders and pushed him gently out of the room before him.

Before they slept that night it was arranged that May and her mother should go to Dawlish, in Devonshire. Mr. Godfrey's mother lived there, which would be a great comfort to Mrs. Rivers; and Dr. Eustace had more than once wished that May could be removed to a warmer climate. A very busy week ensued, but they were fortunate in finding the owner of the house very glad

to take it off their hands, as house rent had risen a good deal since they had become his tenants. Mr. Godfrey had to look out for new lodgings, and it was arranged that Harry should engage a bedroom in the same house, and live with his friend ; an arrangement which made him much less lonely than otherwise he must have done. He had the pleasure, too, of taking his mother and sister down to Dawlish, and establishing them in their pretty lodgings, in a cottage all covered with roses and jasmine, and facing the sea. It was enough to cheer him in his new and uncongenial life to recall May's face, as she lay on a couch near the window and looked at the sea. The child could not speak, but her face was enough.

Back to London, with a quiet resolve to do his duty, Harry Rivers came. He was soon quite a favorite with Mr. Frere ; but though of course he frequently saw Mr. Marshall, the old gentleman took no more notice of him than of any other clerk.

Harry little suspected how closely his grandfather watched him.



CHAPTER V.

A BRIGHT ENDING.

THUS passed away the rest of that sultry summer. The winter which followed it was mild and warm, and May seemed to gain strength ; her breathing was quite relieved, and the sad pain in her back tormented her less. Harry saw her occasionally, when Mr. Frere would give him leave to quit the office early on Saturday, and he would spend Sunday with his mother and May. He began to hope that soon his little darling would begin to walk again, but Mr. Godfrey, who had more experience, shook his head, and bid him not dwell upon such thoughts.

Then came spring, bringing keen east winds, even in sheltered Dawlish; and May began to fail again, but very slowly. Her mother and brother ceased to hope that she would be restored to them, yet they thought they might keep her with them for many months more. The end, however, was nearer than they imagined.

One Friday Harry was in his usual place in the office, hard at work. No clerk in Mr. Marshall's employment got through more work, or did it better, than Harry Rivers. And of this Mr. Marshall was fully aware, little as he seemed to notice him. And one reward of this conscientious conduct was, that the work which had been so distasteful appeared quite interesting now, since he had forced himself to take an interest in doing it well.

His desk was next the door of the outer office; at that very desk his father had sat long ago, and "F. Rivers" was cut upon it with a penknife. Harry took it for granted that his father had cut those letters himself,

and frequently, when no one was near, passed his hand over them, just for the pleasure of touching what that dear father had touched. But just now he was very busy, adding up long columns of figures, when the outer door opened, and Mr. Godfrey came hastily in. "Harry," he whispered, "come out here with me for a moment."

Harry obeyed, turning very pale. "Mr. Godfrey," he said, "May is worse! I know it."

Mr. Godfrey put a letter into his hand; it was marked "Immediate."

Yes, May was worse, much worse. "A sudden, awful change," his mother wrote; "you must come to us at once, dear Harry, if you possibly can." Harry was still reading his letter, half stunned, when Mr. Frere came out of the counting-house to ask what was the matter. Mr. Godfrey explained to him.

"Rivers," said the old clerk, kindly, "Mr. Marshall is in his private room now; go to him and get leave; he will be going away directly."

Harry went and knocked at the door.

"Come in. What do you want, Mr. Rivers?"

"I have had a letter, sir, to say that my sister is much worse — dying, I fear — and I want to go to her, if you will allow me."

"Certainly. You may go at once. Who wrote to you?"

"My mother, sir."

"Have you any objection to show me the letter?" inquired the old man, in exactly the same business-like voice. Harry gave it to him, and waited while he read it. Then, refolding it, Mr. Marshall gave it back, saying,

"The child seems in a very bad way. You may remain as long as you are wanted, Mr. Rivers."

Harry bowed and withdrew. He lost no time in hastening to Dawlish; but, to his sorrow, little May did not know him. She lay there quiet, and at ease apparently, but she took no notice of anything. She had been in that state for hours, and the doctor

thought she would pass away without any further suffering. But poor Harry longed sorely for one word from the dear, patient voice, one look of love from the pretty blue eyes ; and he was not denied this consolation. On Sunday morning the church bells seemed to rouse her ; she opened her eyes suddenly, and asked, "Has Harry come ?"

"Yes ; I am here, May."

"Is this you, Harry ? My eyes are so dim that I cannot see you plainly. But I am glad you are come in time to say good-bye to me ; and I wanted to thank you, too, for you have made me very happy here with mamma, and I have had so little pain since I came here. Take care of mamma, Harry ; don't let her fret."

Harry made no answer ; he was weeping bitterly.

The child looked from one to the other with a strange, sweet smile : "Don't cry," she said ; "there is no reason to cry, you know — we shall all meet again in heaven, and be so happy, all of us well and strong, remember, and papa come back."

“Yes, my little May,” Harry said, gently. “It is well for you, and we must try to be content, but it is hard for us.”

“Yet I have been very useless and troublesome. Oh, Harry! think that very soon, instead of lying here, not able to do anything for anybody, I shall be with Him! with Jesus and his angels!—for though I *have* been useless and silly, and often cross and impatient, I know that it is all forgiven. He loves us so, he will forget all that, just as mamma does; for mamma won't even let me say that I was often cross; she always puts her hand on my lips, and says, ‘You are my darling, May.’ And I know he will say, ‘You are my own little child; I was often sorry for you.’ Don't you think, Harry, he loves me as much as mamma does?”

Harry could not answer, his voice was choked, but Mrs. Rivers, strong in the mother's love to which the child appealed, spoke at once, “Much better, my darling. Mine is but a human love, weak and powerless; his love is Divine and almighty. He

loves you better than any one on earth could love."

"That's what the hymn says — the one you said last night. Say it again, mamma."

Mrs. Rivers began at once —

"Can a mother's tender care
Cease toward the child she bare?
Yes, she may forgetful be,
Yet will I remember thee.

Mine is an unchanging love,
Higher than the heights above,
Deeper than the depths beneath,
Free and faithful, strong as death.

Thou shalt see my glory soon,
When the work of grace is done;
Partner of my throne shalt be, —
Say, poor sinner, lovest thou me?"

"Ah, *indeed* I do," May whispered softly.
"How could I help it? Not enough — but soon I shall love better. Mamma, I am so sleepy."

Then she slept, and waking presently, said she had "lovely dreams — all about angels." And when the bells rung out their evening chimes May was with the angels, and with

their Lord and hers. Mother and son grieved for their darling, but they knew that their sorrow was only for themselves. They did not wish her back again in her suffering life. Still they felt very sad and lonely when they returned to London, leaving all that was mortal of their little May lying in the pretty church-yard, within hearing of the sea she had loved so well.

One morning, some time afterwards, when Mrs. Rivers had returned to London, Harry was just leaving home to go to the office, when his mother stopped him.

“Harry, dear, don't you think you might return to your studies now? I am quite sure that I could earn enough to support us both in a very poor way, but you would not mind that.”

Harry kissed her. “Yes, mother! I should mind it very much. In fact, I won't hear of it. Now hold your tongue, ma'am; I'm going to be a regular tyrant to you, and have my way in everything; and you shall never work for my living, nor for your own

either, as long as I can earn enough for both of us.

"But, Harry, I cannot bear the idea of keeping you at work you dislike—all for me, when I am still young and strong."

"Not over-strong, mother. I don't dislike my work either. I did at first, but I really do not now. Besides, I am not losing all my time; I get a good deal of work, painting, I mean, done in the early mornings, and in the evenings too, and, curious to say, I believe I am improving very much."

"But if you gave up the office—"

"Mother, don't tempt me. Even if it were not my duty to provide for you, common honesty would make me remain in the office. I agreed with Mr. Marshall that if he gave me a larger salary at first, I would remain until I had worked it out; so that settles the question, and I'm glad of it, for you would otherwise coax me into leaving, and then I should feel as good for nothing and wicked as I did before I went there."

"You are very obstinate, Harry."

"Very; and you had better give in at once. Now, mother! ought I not to fill my father's place as far as I can? Don't remind me of the time when I was so selfish."

"Dear boy, you never were selfish. You are not like your father in face, Harry; but yet somehow you remind me so much of him sometimes."

"Mother," said Harry, earnestly, "I had rather hear you say that than be the greatest painter the world ever saw."

Mr. Marshall had been out of town for some time, but came back that morning. In the course of the day Mr. Frere sent Harry into the private room with some papers; his grandfather took them in silence, glancing at the black dress. Presently he said,

"The child died, then?"

"Yes, sir," said Harry, in a low voice. Mr. Marshall opened his letters, and Harry was leaving the room, when again looking up, the old man said drily,

"You'll be going back to your artist life

now, I suppose. You have no further object in remaining here."

"I have my mother still, thank heaven. Besides, sir, you forget I have to work out my extra salary."

"Ay, I remember all that, but I fancied your memory might fail you. How long do you expect it will take you to work it out?"

"Ten years, if I go on at my present rate without the usual increase."

"You are right, I think—yes, in ten years we shall be quits. But ten years is a long time. You'll be eight-and-twenty then."

"I shall, sir."

"After all," said the old man, looking very keenly at him—"after all, you are better off, I suspect. Not one artist in a hundred succeeds: the other ninety-nine starve. I dare say you prefer remaining in my employment on that account."

"No, sir. I believe I should succeed; and I love it for its own sake."

"So then, when our bargain ends, you

mean to begin life again as an artist, at eight-and-twenty — eh ? ”

“ I cannot tell what I shall do, Mr. Marshall. I am quite content to leave it till the time comes.”

“ Well, I'll give you my opinion, Harry Rivers, if you care to have it. You'll do your duty, whatever that may be. Take these words of praise from one who praises rarely, and who has watched you closely. You may go now,” he added, shortly.

Harry was detained at the office that day until five o'clock, as there was an unusual press of business. On his way home he had to pass the church they attended. The bell was ringing for evening service. He knew his mother would be there, so he went in also ; he seldom had time for church-going on week days now.

He seated himself just where he had sat on that summer evening years ago, when for the last time he had heard his father's deep sweet voice in the choir. The words of the hymn, and the conversation that had followed,

came back into his mind very clearly. He remembered how unnatural it had seemed to him, and how he had declared that to that state of mind *he* never could come. And his father had answered, "I don't mind promising you that you will understand that hymn one of these days." Then his own speech that morning to his grandfather came back to him, "I am quite content to leave it till the time comes." His father had been right. He had learned the lesson taught by sorrow and trial; "one step" was enough for him now, provided that step was in the right direction.

I might leave my young hero here, and no one would have any cause to pity him, for he had found the peace that the world can never give nor take away. But there was another change in store for him, of which I must now tell you.

It did not come for two years, during which Harry worked away, both in the office and at his painting. Mr. Eastwood came home from Italy, and found his old pupil

established with his mother and Mr. Godfrey in a pleasant small house in Kensington, where Harry had an attic all to himself as a studio ; which made him very happy, but he kept it in such an untidy state that it was a constant source of grief to his mother. Artists, perhaps you are not aware, are not addicted to neatness ; they don't like the process of putting by their implements when they leave off work, nor do they even like to have it done for them, as Mrs. Rivers discovered after one or two attempts of the kind, which drove poor Harry to distraction. Mr. Eastwood declared that his old pupil had got on as much during his absence as he would have done had he been at home and still giving him lessons ; and with this encouragement Harry worked harder than ever.

But a day came that put an end to this state of things very suddenly and unexpectedly. Harry was in his usual place in the counting-house, and all was going on as usual, though Mr. Marshall had not arrived

at his appointed hour. Jennings, the porter, entered with a note for Mr. Frere, on reading which that generally staid and quiet man rushed out of the house without his hat, hailed a hansom, and was whirled away without having given any explanation to the other clerks. He was absent for some time, and when he returned it was to dismiss them all to their homes, and to close the counting-house for several days, for their stern but just master was dead. He had died in the night quite suddenly, having gone to bed apparently in his usual health.

Little as Harry had seen of his grandfather, he was both shocked and grieved; and he knew moreover, that his death would be a real sorrow to his mother, who had never quite ceased to hope for her father's forgiveness. He hurried home, that she might hear it first from him, and not from common report. Poor Mary was sadly overcome.

But imagine her surprise, when, the day after the funeral, her eldest brother, now

the head of the house, came to see her, and to assure her that until that day he had never known Harry Rivers to be her son and his nephew, often as he had seen him in the counting-house. He knew it now from the following words in his father's will — they had been added to it about the time of May's death.

“To my grandson, Henry Marshall Rivers, now in my employment as clerk, I leave two hundred pounds a year, to be paid to him by my eldest son. And I release my grandson from his engagement to remain in the service of the firm for ten years from this date. And I wish to make known to my sons that Henry Rivers has won my respect and esteem by his upright and honorable conduct while in my employment.”

This request made Harry a very happy man. Now he could return to the profession he loved, and realize all his brightest dreams, without exposing his mother to hardship and distress. He is now studying in Italy, and his name is becoming well known as a rising artist.

